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EDITORS

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Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature

BY

ALBERT DE JONG

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ABBREVIATIONS

1. *Texts*

A.	*Āfrīnagān*
Aog.	*Aogəmadaēcā*
AWN	*Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*
CAP	*Cīdag Andarz ī Pōryōtkēšān* (*Pand-nāmag ī Zardušt*)
Dd.	*Dādestān ī Dēnīg*
Dk(M).	*Dēnkard* (ed. Madan)
G.	*Gāh*
GBd.	*Greater or Iranian Bundahišn*
H.	*Hērbedestān*
HN	*Hādoxt Nask*
MHD	*Mādayān ī hazār dādestān*
MX	*Dādestān ī mēnōg ī xrad*
N.	*Nērangestān*
Ny.	*Niyāyišn*
PhlRAdFb	*Pahlavi Rivāyat of Ādur-Farnbāg*
PhlRDd	*Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*
PhlT.	*Pahlavi Texts* (ed. J.M. Jamasp-Asana)
PhlVd.	*Pahlavi Vendīdād*
PhlY.	*Pahlavi Yasna*
RV	*Ṛg-Veda*
SDB	*Sad dar-i Bondaheš*
SDN	*Sad dar-i nasr*
ŠnŠ	*Šāyest nē-Šāyest*
TrlZXA	*Translation of the Zand ī xwurdag Abestāg*
Vd.	*Vendīdād* (*Vīdēvdāt*)
Vr.	*Visperad*
Wyt.	*Wištāsp Yašt*
WZ	*Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*
Y.	*Yasna*
YH	*Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*
Yt.	*Yašt*
ZN	*Zarātoštnāmeh*
ZWY	*Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (*Zand ī Bahman Yašt*)

2. *Languages*

Akk.	Akkadian
Ar.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
Arm.	Armenian
Av.	Avestan
El.	Elamite
Gk	Greek
Ir	Iranian

MIr	Middle Iranian
MMP	Manichaean Middle Persian
MP	Middle Persian
NP	New Persian
OIr	Old Iranian
OP	Old Persian
Oss.	Ossetic
Phl.	Pahlavi
Pth.	Parthian
Sgd.	Soghdian

3. *Books, series and journals*

AchHist	*Achaemenid History*
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AHM	I. Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra*
AI	*Acta Iranica*
AIrWb	C. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
AMI	*Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*
AMI ErgBd	*Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, Ergänzungsband
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
AoF	*Altorientalische Forschungen*
AOS	*American Oriental Series*
ArOr	*Archiv Orientální*
ARW	*Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*
AsForsch	*Asiatische Forschungen*
ASNP	*Annali della scuola normale superiore di Pisa*
ASSR	*Archives de sciences sociales des religions*
BABesch	*Bulletin Antieke Beschaving*
BAI NS	*Bulletin of the Asia Institute, New Series*
BEFAR	*Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome*
BICS	*Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*
BKP	*Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie*
BSL	*Bulletin de la société de linguistique*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
Bull.Ass.Budé	*Bulletin de l'association Guillaume Budé*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CC	J.J. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*
CCCA	M.J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*
CCSG	*Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca*
CHI	*Cambridge History of Iran*
CII	*Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*
CIMRM	M.J. Vermaseren: *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae*
CLI	R. Schmitt (ed.), *Compendium linguarum iranicarum*
CMC	M. Molé: *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien*
CMRDM	E.N. Lane, *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Dei Menis*
Comp.Stud. Soc.Hist.	*Comparative Studies in Society and History*
CRAI	*Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et des belles-lettres*
DDD	K. van der Toorn, B. Becking & P.W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*

DHA	*Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
EIr	*Encyclopedia Iranica*
EPRO	*Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain*
ERE	J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*
EW	*East and West*
EZ	J.H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*
FGrHist	F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*
GCS	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte*
GGR	M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*
GR	W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
GrIrPhil	W. Geiger & E. Kuhn (eds.), *Grundriß der iranischen Philologie*
HdO	*Handbuch der Orientalistik*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HThR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HZ	M. Boyce (& F. Grenet), *A History of Zoroastrianism*
IIJ	*Indo-Iranian Journal*
IOS	*Israel Oriental Studies*
IrAnt	*Iranica Antiqua*
IrStud	*Iranian Studies*
IstForsch	*Istanbuler Forschungen*
IstMitt	*Istanbuler Mitteilungen*
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JCOI	*Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JS	*Journal des Savants*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
JSAS	*Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*
KZ	*Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung (auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen)*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	H.G. Liddle, R. Scott, H.S. Jones et alii, *A Greek-English Lexicon*
MDAFI	*Mémoires de la délégation archéologique française en Iran*
MDO	*Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-gesellschaft*
MH	*Museum Helveticum*
MIO	*Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung*
MSS	*Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft*
NTOA	*Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus*
NTT	*Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*
OBO	*Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*
OGIS	W. Dittenberger (ed.), *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*
OLA	*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*
OLP	*Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*
OnPers	M. Mayrhofer, *Onomastica Persepolitana*
Or.Suec.	*Orientalia Suecana*
ORT	*Orientalia Rheno-Traiectina*
PFECIS	Gnoli & Panaino (eds.), *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies*

PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
PGL	G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*
PSECIS	B. Fragner et alii (eds.), *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies*
PTS	*Patristische Texte und Studien*
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RE	*Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Pauly-Wissowa)
REAnc	*Revue des études anciennes*
REArm	*Revue des études arméniennes*
RECAM	*Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor*
REG	*Revue des études grecques*
RHLR	*Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuses*
RhM	*Rheinisches Museum*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RSO	*Rivista degli studi Orientali*
RVV	*Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten*
SB etc.	*Sitzungsberichte* etc.
SBE	*Sacred Books of the East*
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*
SGRR	*Studies in Greek and Roman Religion*
SHR	*Studies in the History of Religions* (Supplements to NUMEN)
SII	*Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*
SJLA	*Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*
SOR	*Serie Orientale Roma*
StIr	*Studia Iranica*
Suppl. Nov.Test.	*Supplements to Novum Testamentum*
TAM	*Tituli Asiae Minoris*
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
ThWNT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament*
TMMM	F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*
TPS	*Transactions of the Philological Society*
TSAJ	*Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum*
UCPCPh	*University of California Publications in Classical Philology*
VigChrist	*Vigiliae Christianae*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WUNT	*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum neuen Testament*
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*
ZTH	G. Gnoli, *Zoroaster's Time and Homeland*

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Jerusalem, December 1996

INTRODUCTION

The present book is intended, most of all, as a contribution to the study of Zoroastrianism. More precisely, it is an attempt to discuss the possible interpretations of the religion of the Persians which are suggested by the evidence of the Greek and Latin texts on that religion. These Classical texts have been collected and discussed several times in the present century. The latest full treatment of the materials, however, dates from 1938. Since then, our views of Zoroastrianism and its history have changed considerably. A new investigation of the Classical texts on Zoroastrianism was therefore felt to be an urgent task. Since introductory problems are discussed in the first two chapters of the present study, we can confine ourselves here to outlining more technical matters and explaining the structure of the book.

The Classical texts on the religion of the Persians can be used in various distinct discussions. One of the subjects of research to which the present study was intended to contribute is the way in which Greek and Roman writers report on the religious traditions of other peoples. Although this question surfaces every now and then, we decided to let another, more urgent, question dominate research: to what extent do the Classical sources confirm or modify conventional reconstructions of ancient Zoroastrianism? The reasons for this choice, and its consequences, are discussed in chapter one. Other questions discussed in chapter one concern standard problems and recent discussions in the handling of Classical texts on barbarian cultures.

Chapter two is an overview of three different trends in academic reconstructions of ancient Zoroastrianism. This chapter is not a historiography of scholarship and does therefore not attempt to provide a complete overview of all different approaches and reconstructions. Such an overview would serve no real purpose for the subject of the present book. The main purpose of chapter two is to introduce non-specialist readers to the variety of approaches to Zoroastrian history and to give a brief inventory of the problems inherent in these views. With this goal in mind, I have distinguished three scholarly approaches, which I have termed the "fragmentising," the "harmonising" and the "diversifying" views. No particular value should be attached to the terms chosen to identify these views. Although it will be clear that I consider the first two perspectives ultimately untenable, it is important to note that the labels attached to them should not be interpreted as an *a priori* disqualification. The three approaches discussed are all within the realm of possibility; those reconstructions of Zoroastrianism which are nowadays universally recognised as impossible have been ignored.

Chapters three and four form the core of the book. Chapter three is a detailed discussion of the five most important passages on the religion of the Persians in Greek literature. They cover a period from the fifth century BCE to the sixth century CE. The five texts evidently reflect different periods and provide information on different manifestations of the religion of the ancient Iranians. It will be argued that the earliest text, Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131-132, and the latest text, Agathias, *Histories* 2.23-25, reflect lay traditions. The other three texts, Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.13-15; Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 46-47; and Diogenes Laertius 1.6-9 appear to reflect priestly Zoroastrian traditions. Strabo focuses entirely on ritual, Plutarch on doctrine and mythology and Diogenes Laertius gives an overview of the lost works of early authorities on the religion of the Magi, which reflects a summary of conventional Greek knowledge of the religion of the Persians.

Chapter four, the longest chapter of the book, is a thematic inventory of information on the religion of the Persians in all Greek and Latin texts. It was inevitable that a certain overlap in content matter occurs in chapters three and four. The Amesha Spentas, for instance, are discussed most fully by Plutarch in *De Iside* 47. In chapter 4.1.2, which is devoted to the texts on the Amesha Spentas, this passage is briefly discussed anew. For convenience's sake and to avoid double lengthy discussions of problematic passages as much as possible, the two chapters are fully cross-referenced.

All passages in ancient languages have been translated. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are my own. For the transcription of Avestan I have adopted Hoffmann's system, for Pahlavi, the system of MacKenzie with occasional changes. References to Iranian texts are to the standard editions: Geldner for the Avesta, and the most recent editions for the Pahlavi and Persian texts. This should not cause too many problems, except perhaps in the case of the *Nērangestān*, where I have followed the numbering of the new edition of Kotwal and Kreyenbroek for the first *fragard*, but—awaiting publication of the following volumes of that edition—the numbering of Waag (i.e. the numbering of Darmesteter) for the later parts. This is indicated by the names of the editors after the numbering of the passage.

This book intends to be accessible to Iranianists as well as Classicists and those specialising in ancient history or the religions of the ancient world. Its main focus, however, is on Iranian religious history. This is an academic discipline that is largely the domain of traditional philological methods. In spite of the fact that it sometimes appears that no two Iranianists agree on any fundamental issue in the history of Zoroastrianism—a situation that continues to make Iranian texts and traditions unattractive materials for those interested in comparative religion—there are some areas where consensus has largely been achieved. Most strikingly for those working on other religious traditions from the ancient world, there is a wide acceptance of the fact that some of the perceived "late" sources (i.e. the Pahlavi books) may be used for the reconstruction of the religious traditions of ancient Zoroastrianism.

In order to ensure the accessibility of the contents to Iranianists and Classicists, substantial attention has been given to introductions to subjects that specialists in either discipline might consider superfluous in a specialised work of this size. Thus, Iranianists will perhaps wonder why it is necessary to explain that *khrafstras* are evil creatures, the killing of which is a meritorious act in Zoroastrianism, and Classicists may wonder why Herodotus and Plutarch require such lengthy introductions. I have tried to strike a balance between explaining everything to everyone and simply assuming specialised knowledge of both disciplines. Bibliographical references accompanying introductory matters are not exhaustive, but are intended to refer readers to fuller discussions of the subject.

CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. *The Classical texts on Iranian religions in Western scholarship*

Before the discovery of the Avesta and the Pahlavi books (that is before the end of the eighteenth century), the main sources of information on the religions of ancient Iran in the West consisted of the Greek and Latin texts on the religion of the Persians together with the descriptions of the religion of the *majūs* (Magi; Zoroastrians) in Arabic and Persian literature, some Persian Zoroastrian texts and the reports from European travellers to Iran and India, who came into contact with the living communities of Zoroastrians.[1] Two impressive attempts to reconstruct the history and religions of ancient Iran belong to this period: Barnabé Brisson's *De regio Persarum principatu libri tres* (Paris 1590), which—in the humanist tradition of his times—is based exclusively on the Greek and Latin texts, and Thomas Hyde's *Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Medorum religionis historia* (Oxford 1700).[2] The latter work is based not only on the Greek and Latin texts, but also on Persian and Arabic literature. It remained the standard work of reference until the publication of the translation of the Avesta by A.H. Anquetil du Perron.[3] The publication of this first translation of the Avesta greatly disappointed the high expectations some prominent authors had of the religion of ancient Iran, and a long-drawn battle ensued before the text of the Avesta was authenticated.[4]

One of the first scholars to use the newly discovered Avesta and elaborate greatly upon the information from Anquetil du Perron—and one of the first to collect the Greek and Latin texts—was the eighteenth-century theologian and historian Johann Friedrich Kleuker, who translated into German Anquetil du Perron's version of the Zoroastrian sacred literature and added an impressive *Anhang* to this translation which was devoted, among many other things, to the importance of the Classical texts.[5] Kleuker's collection formed the basis for all subsequent research in the nineteenth century. Most research in that century, however, was devoted to the nascent discipline of Indo-Iranian linguistics, and little work was done on the other sources for the history of Zoroastrianism.

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[1] For this latter aspect, cf. N.K. Firby, *European Travellers and their Perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (AMI Erg.Bd. 14), Berlin 1988.

[2] For a general introduction, cf. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster*, Oxford 1958 (Westport 1973[2]), 1-19.

[3] A.H. Anquetil du Perron, *Zend-Avesta*, Paris 1771. For this part of the early history of Indo-Iranian studies, cf. R. Schwab, *La renaissance orientale*, Paris 1950.

[4] This battle is amply described by J. Darmesteter, *The Zend-Avesta I: The Vendīdād* (SBE 4), Oxford 1887 (numerous reprints), xi-xxv.

In 1863 F. Spiegel edited the remaining essays on the Zoroastrian tradition from the heritage of the German orientalist Friedrich Windischmann, under the title *Zoroastrische Studien. Abhandlungen zur Mythologie und Sagengeschichte des alten Iran*. Windischmann had previously published two essays of fundamental importance on the Iranian divinities Mithra and Anahita. One of the essays, which Windischmann sadly did not live to complete, was devoted to the Classical texts on Zoroastrianism.[6] Windischmann's essay begins with the odd and unconvincing theory that the Persian sages called Zoroaster and Zaratas are two distinct persons, one of them the Iranian Zarathustra and the other a Chaldean philosopher. In the course of his essay, Windischmann strictly followed a chronological order of the texts. He almost exclusively compared the Classical texts with the Avesta, although he also paid some attention to comparative materials from the Indian literary traditions. But all accounts of Greek authors which ran counter to Windischmann's perception of the Zoroastrian tradition were explained away as distortions or lies.[7] In fact, Windischmann was so fascinated with texts that he ignored the oral character of Zoroastrianism (which was evident from the Classical texts he studied as well), and reached the conclusion that the bulk of the Avesta was known to the Greek world in writing in the 3rd century BCE (*Zoroastrische Studien*, 293). All later texts he regarded with suspicion, since they were probably influenced by Roman imperial syncretism, magian mystery cults and pseudo-Zoroastrian literature (*ibid.*). Windischmann's essay was therefore by no means complete. One of its greatest merits is the fact that he was the first scholar to pay detailed attention to the quotations of authors from the Classical period in later compilations.

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[5] J.F. Kleuker, *Zend-Avesta. Zoroasters lebendiges Wort*, Riga 1776-1783.

[6] F. Windischmann, 'Stellen der Alten über Zoroastrisches', in: *id.*, *Zoroastrische Studien*, Berlin 1863, 260-313.

[7] See for instance his exclamatory remarks on Apuleius, whom he introduces as "der widerliche Schönredner Apulejus" (*Zoroastrische Studien*, 264).

A much more ambitious treatment of the Classical texts on the Persian religion appeared few years later. In 1865 and 1866, A. Rapp published two long articles on the religions and customs of the Persians and other Iranians in Greek and Latin sources.[8] In these articles he presented a complete picture of the Persian religion, basing himself rather loosely on the Classical texts. His fundamental contribution to the study of the Classical texts themselves is his theory that the Classical texts—a meagre collection in comparison with the indigenous materials—are of exceptional importance, because they are the only texts that offer information on the religious situation in Western Iran. In Rapp's view, the Avesta is only concerned with and entirely based in Eastern Iran, which in turn was an almost complete *terra incognita* for the Greeks. The Old Persian inscriptions were of little consequence, because they do not deal with religion very much. Rapp therefore considered the Greek texts and the Avesta as complementary sources for the history of Iranian religions. This theory did not gain wide acceptance, due to the rather superficial information the Classical texts usually seem to offer, but at present, more than a century after the publication of his articles, awareness is growing of the fact that Rapp was probably right in this respect, be it in ways wholly different from the directions his research took. In spite of all this, Rapp's commentary suffers from many serious flaws. Rapp writes pages of commentary without referring to any Classical text and even in his references he does not provide the reader with much information. Western sources are hardly ever mentioned at all and as a whole the outline of his argument is more often than not very obscure. It is therefore almost impossible to relate his theories to the Classical sources, which form the basis of his research. He is also prone to make rash identifications, as can be seen in his identification of the divinity Omanos with the Iranian god Haoma.

After these German publications, the Greek and Latin sources became the subject of many articles and some books all over the world. In 1898 the American orientalist A.V.W. Jackson published his famous book on the life and legends of Zarathustra.[9] In it, he gave as an appendix a collection of Classical sources mentioning Zarathustra's name, collected by L.H. Gray ('Appendix V: Classical passages mentioning Zoroaster's name', pp. 226-259), which was the first attempt since Kleuker at a complete collection of the relevant sources. Jackson's interest was only devoted to the occurrence of the name of Zarathustra in the different forms it took, and his collection was never intended to be a complete survey of Classical literature on ancient Iranian religion. For its immediate purpose however, it is a fairly complete collection, which was avidly used by later scholars and—together with the book as a whole, which actually was not very much concerned with these secondary traditions—had a great impact on their work.

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[8] A. Rapp, 'Die Religion und Sitte der Perser und übrigen Iranier nach den Griechischen und Römischen Quellen', *ZDMG* 1865, 1-89; 1866, 49-205.

Fifteen years later James Hope Moulton published the written version of the Hibbert Lectures he was invited to deliver in 1912, under the title *Early Zoroastrianism*.[10] In his lectures, he mostly concentrated upon the Iranian evidence, but in order to prove his theory, he needed the Classical reports as well. Moulton suggested there were three different layers in the composite Persian religion, pre-Zoroastrian nature-worship, Zoroastrianism and Magianism. The evidence he adduced for the separate existence of these layers, mainly derived from some Classical texts. These texts he translated with explanatory notes and appended to the book under the heading 'Passages from Greek authors' (*EZ*, 391-421). In this appendix he translated texts from Herodotus and Strabo to prove the existence of pre-Zoroastrian nature-worship, and Plutarch and Diogenes as specimens of the existence of Magianism. What was entirely new in Moulton's treatment of the texts, was the philological approach he took, sprinkling the explanatory notes with learned comments on the textual tradition of the different texts. In general, however, his reconstruction of the different layers of Iranian religions failed to convince. This is due at least partly to his questionable theories on non-Aryan layers in Zoroastrianism (represented by the Magi), which had perverted a noble faith (*EZ*, 182-225).

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[9] A.V.W. Jackson, *Zoroaster. The Prophet of Ancient Iran*, New York 1898.

[10] J.H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism: The Origins, the Prophet, the Magi*, London 1913 (repr. Amsterdam 1972).

It was again a German scholar who finally provided the learned world with the essential tools of a complete (or nearly complete) collection of the relevant texts, and a commentary on these texts and on these texts alone. In 1920 Carl Clemen published, almost simultaneously, the *Fontes historiae religionis Persicae*,[11] an almost complete collection of the Greek and Latin sources on the Persian religion, and his commentary on these texts, *Die griechischen und lateinischen Nachrichten über die persische Religion*.[12] Since their publication these books have been the standard reference works for all later publications on the Classical texts. The *Fontes* (with some minor additions) were translated into English by W.S. Fox and R.E.K. Pemberton[13] and so gained a wide popularity among both Western and Parsi scholars. Clemen's collection is indeed almost complete, although it sometimes suffers from a surplus of passages. The inclusion of a text comparing the destruction of the Acropolis by Xerxes with the philosophy of Epicurus is by no means relevant for the history of Iranian religions, even though one can detect a combination of Iran and religion.[14]

Clemen wrote an elaborate commentary on the texts he had collected in the *Fontes*. In this commentary he organised the materials around a number of themes: the date, homeland and life of Zarathustra, the religion of the Achaemenians, the religion of the people and the Magi. The main theory underlying the commentary is the idea that the Classical sources may describe elements of the Zoroastrian tradition which have vanished from the indigenous sources. These are not only important for the dating of various periods and events in the Zoroastrian tradition, but may actually have preserved otherwise unrecorded beliefs from ancient Iran. In itself this makes good sense, but Clemen's reliance on the trustworthiness of many ancient authors causes him now and then to jump to somewhat awkward conclusions.

The general conclusions reached by Clemen on the topics he selected for his commentary were in many ways far ahead of their time. Clemen carefully argued that Zarathustra is to be dated no earlier than 1000 BCE,[15] that the Achaemenians were Zoroastrians[16] and that most of the accounts of personal religious beliefs and practices among the Persians as recorded in the Classical texts are in full harmony with the known indigenous traditions.[17] These conclusions are nowadays shared by most specialists, but when Clemen wrote his commentary, they were revolutionary both in content and in the carefully argued use Clemen made of the Classical texts. Nevertheless, his commentary was quickly forgotten and is little used at present, perhaps due to the chaotic arrangement of the material.

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[11] C. Clemen, *Fontes historiae religionis Persicae* (Fontes historiae religionum ex auctoribus Graecis et Latinis collecti, fasc. I), Bonn 1920.

[12] C. Clemen, *Die griechischen und lateinischen Nachrichten über die persische Religion* (RVV XVII.1), Giessen 1920.

[13] W.S. Fox & R.E.K. Pemberton, 'Passages in Greek and Latin Literature Relating to Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism Rendered into English', *JCOI* 14 (1929).

[14] Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.41.115.

Six years after the publication of the *Nachrichten*, the French linguist Emile Benveniste was invited to hold the Ratanbai Katrak Lectures. The text of his lectures was published three years later in a small book, *The Persian religion according to the chief Greek texts*.[18] This book was explicitly intended for classicists and scholars interested in ancient history "to summarise concisely [...] the facts which have been proved as a result of discussions which were often confused."[19] This intention, however, is nowhere to be found in the lectures themselves, for they are mostly a bitter polemic against the theories of Clemen and other scholars. The book in fact presents a highly personal view of the history of Iranian religions which has never gained acceptance in its entirety, although the book is often quoted on minor subjects and still enjoys great popularity.

Benveniste discussed only three Classical passages, but declared firmly: "... in what we have had to neglect there is nothing which contradicts any of the principal evidences to which this study is restricted and nothing which adds very much to them. If we confine ourselves thus to the most important data, it is possible to formulate definite conclusions."[20] These definite conclusions, it must be noted, did not at all reflect opinions that were current in Benveniste's own time, nor opinions that are generally shared nowadays. On the basis of Herodotus, Strabo and Plutarch, Benveniste discerned three different religions which were current in Iran: the religion Herodotus describes is the ancient Iranian nature religion, Strabo offers a description of a "degenerate" (*sic*) Mazdaism and Plutarch describes Zurvanism in its purest form. His opinions were not shared by most subsequent researchers, even though the care Benveniste took in distinguishing different layers of Iranian religions in different Classical authors—or the attention he paid to the fact that the three authors he selected are likely to reflect different religious traditions, if only for the very different periods and localisations of their composition—is generally praised.[21]

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[15] *Nachrichten*, 28.

[16] *Nachrichten*, 54-94. The chapter on the religion of the Achaemenians is an ongoing polemic against those scholars who wanted to deny the Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenians.

[17] *Nachrichten*, 95-204.

[18] E. Benveniste, *The Persian religion according to the chief Greek texts*, Paris 1929.

[19] Benveniste, *Persian religion*, 12-13.

[20] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 118.

Probably the most influential remarks of Benveniste's book were those in which he stated over and over again that the Classical texts had been completely collected and exhaustively studied by the time he gave his lectures. He thus ran the risk of discouraging everyone of having another look at those texts. How wrong he was in stating that all had been said concerning the Classical texts, was shown in 1938 with the publication of the two-volume work *Les Mages Hellénisés* by Franz Cumont and Joseph Bidez.[22] In two bulky volumes they collected all Greek texts referring to Zoroaster, Ostanes and Hystaspes, with a particular stress on the Greek pseudo-Zoroastrian literature. Their main interest was not the factual reports on Iranian religions, but the Classical texts presenting a mixture of Greek and Iranian ideas. The book was a tremendous success, even though some of the general conclusions and the underlying theories were immediately rejected in an authoritative review by A.D. Nock.[23] The impact the book had on subsequent studies of pseudo-Zoroastrian literature can best be grasped by the fact that the next major study of the same texts was only undertaken some 50 years after the appearance of the *Mages Hellénisés*.[24]

Bidez and Cumont gave their interpretative frame in the first volume of their work and collected all relevant texts—with innumerable notes and references—in the second volume. The main theory underlying their work is based more or less on the texts mentioning a special group of Iranians, the Magusaeans. In their view, the Magusaeans were Persian priests who had come to Asia Minor via Babylonia, and had brought their own religion with them. This religion had undergone the influence of Babylonian astronomy and astrology first, and had then been influenced by Stoicism in the Greek-speaking world. Their religion therefore was a strange medley of Iranian, "Chaldean" and Stoic thought. What is more important is that Bidez and Cumont argued that these Magusaeans, these Hellenised Magi, were responsible for the large amount of pseudo-Zoroastrian literature, and for the spread of Mithraism to the West (cf. ch. 1.5). Notwithstanding the rejection of their main theories, the *Mages Hellénisés* remains the essential treatment of the subject of the appropriation and use of Iranian names and themes in Greek literature and will be used and referred to throughout this study.

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[21] Thus Molé, *CMC*, 8-9.

[22] J. Bidez & F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés. Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque*, Paris 1938 (repr. Paris 1973).

[23] A.D. Nock, 'Greeks and Magi', *JRS* 30 (1940), 191-198 (=*Essays*, 2.516-526).

[24] R. Beck, 'Thus spake not Zarathuštra: Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha of the Greco-Roman world', *HZ* III, 491-565.

After the publication of the *Mages Hellénisés* the interest in the Classical traditions on ancient Iranian religions weakened. The main reason for this probably was the fact that Iranian philologists had made tremendous steps forward in the reading and interpretation of genuine Iranian texts. The discovery and rapid decipherment of the Turfan manuscripts and the enormous impact they had on the reading of the longer-known Middle Persian texts, allowed scholars for the first time to have a more thorough understanding of authentic Zoroastrian texts. The increasing use of comparative philology in the field of Vedic and Avestan literature opened up Zoroaster's own words and those of his immediate followers, and the archaeological exploration of the important Achaemenian cities offered new insights in the material remains of the first Persian empire. Although numerous articles continued to be written on certain Classical texts, and the texts continued to be used in general introductions to the history of Iranian religions, the Classical texts were not taken up again as a subject of research by Iranianists.

2. *A double unknown: problems and prospects*

The Greek and Latin sources on Oriental religions in general—Egyptian as well as Mesopotamian and Indian, Zoroastrianism as well as Judaism—are an important source for the history of ancient religions.[25] On the basis of a comparison between the

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[25] For overviews and introductions: EGYPT—Th. Hopfner, *Fontes historiae*

Greek and Latin descriptions and what the indigenous sources tell us, we can reconstruct general processes and attitudes in Greek ethnography[26] with particular reference to religion and religions. For some individual authors, such comparisons have indeed been made; these investigations have contributed much to our understanding of Greek religious ethnography and Greek religious self-definitions.[27]

As was noted in the introduction, the present study was meant partly to contribute to this field by taking Zoroastrianism as an example. Zoroastrianism appeared to be an ideal case for such a comparison; it had been a presence in the ancient world from before Herodotus up to the early Byzantine period (and beyond) and it was the religion of the Iranians. The Iranians, in turn, were the hereditary opponents of Greeks and Romans for long and important periods of their history and the history of their literature.[28] The Greek and Latin texts on this subject had most recently been discussed in greater detail more than fifty years ago; since then, our understanding of Zoroastrian history has

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religionis aegyptiacae, Bonn 1922-1925 (5 vols.); A.B. Lloyd, *Herodotus. Book II* (EPRO 43), Leiden 1975-1988 (3 vols.); INDIA—R.C. Majumdar, *The Classical Accounts of India*, Calcutta 1960; K. Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature* (Studia Orientalia 65), Helsinki 1989; M.-P. Delaygue, 'Les Grecs connaissaient-ils les religions de l'Inde à l'époque hellénistique?' *Bull.Ass.Budé* 1995, 152-172; MESOPOTAMIA—A. Kuhrt, 'Assyrian and Babyonian Traditions in Classical Literature. A Critical Synthesis', in: H.J. Nissen & J. Renger (eds.), *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn. Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Berliner Vorträge zum vorderen Orient 1), Berlin 1987^2, 539-553; JUDAISM—M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Jerusalem 1974-1984 (3 vols.).

[26] For which, cf. K.E. Müller, *Geschichte der antiken Ethnographie und ethnologischen Theoriebildung: von den Anfängen bis auf die byzantinischen Historiographen*, Wiesbaden 1972-1980 (2 vols.).

[27] Cf. F. Mora, *Religione e religioni nelle storie di Erodoto*, Milano 1985; the same author is preparing a three-volume work on the subject, of which the first volume, *Il pensiero storico-religioso antica. Autori greci e Roma I: Dionigi d'Alicarnasso* (Storia delle Religioni 12), Roma 1995, has appeared (*non vidi*). Cf. also W. Burkert, 'Herodot als Zeuge fremder Religionen', in: *Hérodote et les peuples non grecs* (Entretiens Hardt 35), Genève 1988, 1-39.

[28] The literature on this rivalry is enormous. Whereas the literature for the Achaemenian period is well-known and easily accessible (there are extensive bibliographies and historiographies of scholarship in the volumes of the series *AchHist*), the later periods are less well-served. For recent introductions to these later periods, cf. J. Wolski, *L'empire des Arsacides* (AI 32), Louvain 1993, for the Parthian period and G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton 1993, 12-36, for the Sasanian period.

changed dramatically, not to mention our understanding of the languages most relevant to the discipline.

Such a project, however, can only succeed if one of two conditions is met: either the Greek and Latin sources must be demonstrably reliable or there must be an authoritative body of reliable indigenous information against which to judge the Classical texts. An example of similar questions is the work of B. Lawrence on Arabic descriptions of the Indian religions, particularly those of Šahrastānī. Lawrence discerns three questions: 1) what evidence was available to Šahrastānī? 2) how reliable was this information? 3) how did Šahrastānī as a Muslim theologian use this information?[29] For the present study, we would also, *mutatis mutandis*, have to ask these same questions: 1) what evidence was available to the Greek and Latin authors on Iranian religions? 2) how reliable was this information? 3) how did the various authors use this information, and what trends can be distinguished in their treatment of the materials?

An answer to the first question would be at least a theoretical possibility. One can collect all the sources and thus present an overview of all that is written on the religion of the Persians and other Iranians. This has largely been achieved and the texts can be consulted in the *Fontes* of Clemen and the *Mages hellênisés* of Bidez and Cumont.

It does not take a very acute observer to recognise that, in all these texts, there are many inventions, fabrications, lies and distortions. There also are creative appropriations: putative Iranians expressing Greek ideas. This is where the second question comes in: how reliable are the sources? It is here that the problems begin. In the case of Judaism and of the Indian religions, one can reasonably claim to possess an authoritative and copious body of texts and other references (such as inscriptions) that can very well serve the purpose of gauging whether information found in Greek and Latin literature is correct. If Plutarch, for example, discusses the option that the Jews do not eat pork, because they worship the pig (*Quaestiones Conviviales* 4.5.1-2), we can show him wrong, because we know that the pig was *not* worshipped and we know the (scriptural) reasons why pork was forbidden.

With regard to the Iranian religious traditions, we can only show authors right. That is to say, we can accept the Avesta and the Pahlavi books as normative repositories of the Zoroastrian tradition and compare the information obtained from Greek and Latin literature with these texts. If the information accords with the Zoroastrian texts, we can say that the information is correct. But the reverse is impossible: if the information does not accord with the Zoroastrian texts, we cannot say that it is *therefore* incorrect. There are several reasons why this is impossible. First of all, the Avestan and Pahlavi texts do not discuss every detail of Zoroastrian life and doctrine. On the contrary, many aspects of daily life and of what one could call popular religiosity are not referred to at all. In the second place, the Zoroastrian sources are priestly documents: they belong to a learned class among the Zoroastrians, concerned with matters of ritual and with the transmission and adaptation of theological traditions. Some aspects of the transmission of this knowledge are responsible for the fact that these theological traditions are not uniform. In the third place, the Zoroastrian traditions are profoundly a-historical: most of the texts cannot be dated with any certainty. Developments in Zoroastrian doctrine and ritual, or the antiquity of an idea in Zoroastrianism, can often only be tentatively established.

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[29] B.B. Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions* (Religion and Society 4), The Hague/Paris 1976.

This brings us to the most critical condition for the study of the Greek and Latin sources on Iranian religions: the Greek and Latin texts are nothing less than fundamental for the writing of a history of Zoroastrianism. Much of the historical reconstructions of Zoroastrian history depends on the Classical texts. This is partly due to the fact that the Zoroastrian literary sources cannot be dated with confidence. For various periods and regions there are no Iranian texts at all, and all our knowledge depends on reports in foreign sources (Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Chinese). Only in this way can a history of Zoroastrianism be reconstructed. This has important consequences for a reappraisal of these foreign sources themselves. One cannot interpret the Classical sources for Zoroastrian history or make statements concerning their reliability by using a general reconstruction of Zoroastrian history based on these same sources. This inevitably results in circular arguments. Such arguments are frequently encountered in treatments of the Classical texts.

An additional problem is caused by the presentation of the materials in the source-collections. Both the *Fontes* and the *Mages hellénisés* are collections of fragments directly relevant for the study of Iranian religions in Classical literature. They are therefore by necessity decontextualised. Contexts, however, are of overwhelming importance for the evaluation of vital aspects of the fragments, particularly the source of the information and the reason for its mention in the larger narratives of the books or treatises they were taken from. The genre of a text and its purpose are important for the evaluation of their contents. There is, for instance, a noticeable difference between the information on Zoroastrianism in the *Moralia* of Plutarch and in his *Lives*. Whereas one can say that several passages in the *Moralia* are virtually unique in their representation of priestly Zoroastrian teachings, the information on Zoroastrianism in the *Lives* is frequently defective, misleading and stereotyped. This problem in the interpretation of Plutarch may be due to the sources he used. The representation of Zoroastrian doctrine and mythology in *De Iside et Osiride* (cf. ch. 3.3) derives in part from Theopompus and in part from unknown authorities, who are often thought to have belonged to the early Academy. For the relevant *Lives* (Artaxerxes, Alexander, Themistocles), Plutarch has drawn upon different sources, for instance Ctesias, who is a very unreliable source for religious matters. But there appears to be more: in *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch conforms to a norm current in certain Platonist circles, to have a consistently high regard for Oriental wisdom and to make certain Oriental sages the mouthpieces of evolved Platonist ideas. In the *Lives*, Plutarch conforms to another norm: to use stereotypes of Oriental despotism and decadence to draw a radiant picture of Greek love of freedom, sophistication and morality. There is a certain clash in world-views here: *De Iside* consists largely of an appropriation and application of "barbarian" wisdom, whereas Plutarch also scorns Herodotus for being a barbarophile, because of the fact that he made Greek culture dependent on barbarian institutions.[30]

These examples from Plutarch are mentioned here to indicate the importance of contextualised readings of the fragments collected in the *Fontes* and in the *Mages hellénisés*. This need has become even more apparent with the steady flow of publications devoted to the critical evaluation of the notion of Hellenism and of the Greek historiography of the Achaemenian empire. Both subjects are of critical importance for the present study, because recent discussions of them have shown with remarkable clarity to what extent Western academic views on ancient history have been moulded by Greek cultural traditions and how these traditions have deformed our understanding of the "barbarian" cultures.

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[30] *De Herodoti malignitate* 12-13 (857A-D).

The interpretation of Hellenism as a historical phenomenon that brought the entire inhabited world the benefits of Greek culture is a familiar image. It offers an attractive explanation for the great profusion of Hellenistic cities in the areas conquered by Alexander, for the presence of gymnasia, Greek temples and theatres in barbarian lands conquered by the Greeks. Thus, earlier treatments of the history of the world in the Hellenistic period frequently stress the missionary nature of Hellenistic culture, the happy amalgam of Oriental and Greek traditions exemplified by those Oriental rulers who proudly called themselves "philhellene."[31] An early attempt to redress the questions pertaining to Hellenisation is the work of S.K. Eddy, who studied the resistance to Hellenisation among the peoples of the Near East. His treatment of these matters has, at least for Persia, underlined rather than supplanted the idea of Hellenisation as a cultural mission, because he departed from notions such as "the full tide of Hellenism," an inescapable development in spite of local rejections.[32]

In more recent scholarship, this use of the concept of Hellenism and Hellenisation is generally regarded as a "Victorian myth."[33] The nineteenth-century background and ideology behind this interpretation have been convincingly outlined by C. Préaux and are by now commonly accepted.[34] In many respects, these new interpretations of Hellenism and Hellenisation stress the exclusive character of Greek settlements, the lack of interaction with non-Greek peoples, the exploitation and colonial attitudes towards the conquered lands and the indifference of the local populations to Greeks and their culture.[35]

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[31] For a conventional representation of the Near East in the Hellenistic period from this perspective, cf. for instance F.E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism: A History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity*, London 1972.

[32] S.K. Eddy, *The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism. 334-31 B.C.*, Lincoln 1961, 65-80.

[33] Thus P. Green, *Classical Bearings. Interpreting Ancient History and Culture*, [London] 1989, 184: "The whole notion of Hellenism as a missionary cult spread for the enlightenment of the heathen is a Victorian myth."

[34] C. Préaux, *Le monde hellénistique*, Paris 1978 [2 vols.]; P. Green, *Alexander to Actium. The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age*, Berkeley 1990; P. Briant, 'The Seleucid Kingdom, the Achaemenid Empire and the History of the Near East in the First Millennium B.C.', in P. Bilde *et alii* (eds.), *Religion and Religious Practice in the Seleucid Kingdom* (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization 1), Århus 1990, 40-65.

This radical alternative has most recently also come under attack as substituting one extreme Hellenocentric view for another: the Greeks and their culture remain the norm, and the response by non-Greeks to Hellenisation is gauged from cultural interaction rather than from political and economic cooperation. A fresh look at the Seleucid empire, on the contrary, has suggested that things cannot be classified this easily.[36]

This innovative work on the Seleucid empire has been much influenced by the revolution in the study of the Achaemenian empire that has taken place over the last 25 years. For the history of the Achaemenian empire, the Greek historical references are the most substantial source. One thus usually finds treatments of the history of the Achaemenian empire that are not only almost exclusively based on the Greek sources, but also reproduce biases and reconstructions that are nowadays held to derive more from Greek literary and cultural traditions and convictions than from faithfully recorded observations of Iranian life.[37] The past 20-odd years, however, have witnessed a virtually total reversal of earlier opinions on precisely this subject: the Greek (and to a much smaller extent the Latin) texts on the Persians, their history and their customs. Several contributions—mainly from ancient historians, Assyriologists and archaeologists—focusing on the history of the Achaemenian empire have opened our eyes to the fact that the general view of the history of the Achaemenian empire that is customary to most of us (sometimes described as the "rise and fall typology") is a construct that derives its primary inspiration from Greek views of the history of their Persian neighbours and—more importantly—of themselves.[38]

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[35] Cf. for instance Green, *Alexander to Actium*, 319: "This ingrained sense of superiority, whether masquerading as panhellenism to sanction the rape of the East, or, later, helping to keep the Ptolemies and, to a lesser degree, Seleucids in cultural isolation, century after century, from the peoples they ruled and exploited, is an extraordinarily constant factor in the history of the Hellenistic era."

[36] A. Kuhrt & S. Sherwin-White (eds.), *Hellenism in the East. The Interaction of Greek and non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*, London 1987, esp. 1-31; S. Sherwin-White & A. Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis. A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire*, London 1993, esp. 141-187.

[37] A well-known example is A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, Chicago 1948 (many reprints).

In this recent flow of publications on the Achaemenian empire, a variety of scholars have tried to reshift the focus of interest and to redress some of the most fundamental questions by making use primarily of indigenous sources (Iranian, Babylonian, Anatolian, Egyptian etc.), of archaeological excavations and of more rigorously defined methodologies. Armed with the data from these inquiries, they return to the indispensable Greek sources and come up with entirely different results and interpretations. Most Greek sources, especially the combination of historical narratives for the various periods, had suggested that the Achaemenian Empire flourished under Cyrus and Darius, but degenerated from the time of Xerxes onwards, to finally suffer a mortal blow from the coming of Alexander. He liberated the world from the hegemony of a people that had once deserved to rule, but had forsaken its earlier glory and was finally overcome by its own decadence through the agency of a young and ambitious Macedonian. This view of the history of Iran did not only dominate Greek literature, but has also dominated Western academic reconstructions of the Achaemenian period.

The innovative work on these matters has succeeded remarkably well in showing how Greek perceptions of the course of history and elements from Greek cultural ideologies have determined academic understanding of Iranian history. Various authors have, moreover, shown how a fresh look at the sources and a careful attention to *all* available sources can show a way out of this situation. The specific field of the history of Iranian religions, however, has so far received little treatment.[39] This is probably due to the problems inherent in the Zoroastrian sources themselves, which leave very little room for historical investigation.

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[38] For a brief introduction to these changes, cf. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Achaemenid History: From Hellenocentrism to Iranocentrism', *PFECIS*, 253-259. It is impossible to give a full bibliography of the many works devoted to this subject here. Some of the most important publications are: P. Briant, *Rois, tributs et paysans. Etudes sur les formations tributaires du Moyen-Orient ancien*, Paris 1982; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Yaunā en Persai. Grieken en Perzen in een ander perspectief* (Diss. Leiden 1980), and of course the eight volumes of the series *AchHist* (Leiden, 1983-1995), directed by H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt. A succinct overview of the consequences of this new approach for the historiography of ancient Iran is J. Wiesehöfer, *Das antike Persien. Von 550 v. Chr. bis 650 n. Chr.*, München/Zürich 1994 (with copious bibliographies on pp. 329-392).

[39] Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, for instance, make only one reference to Zoroastrianism (on p. 75); it is true that the study of Zoroastrianism is difficult, but this should not necessarily lead to the casual neglect to which it is subjected in this study of the Seleucid empire.

There are thus several reasons why a fresh study of the Greek and Latin passages referring to Zoroastrianism appears in order. The present book is intended as a contribution to this subject. It seems difficult to pay equal attention to the two subjects of research entered upon in similar research: Greek and Roman attitudes towards foreign religions in general and Iranian religions in particular on the one hand, and the possibilities of using these Greek and Latin texts for the reconstruction of Zoroastrianism on the other. In the present book, the latter question occupies a central place: to what extent do the Greek and Latin sources add to or modify conventional reconstructions of Zoroastrianism? It will become evident that the choice to give preponderance to this aspect of the subject has consequences for the selection and the organisation of the material, as well as for the interpretation. One evident area where such consequences will become apparent is in the pseudo-Zoroastrian texts and in those texts which in all likelihood project Greek ideas onto Iranian names (cf. ch. 1.5). For a reconstruction of attitudes towards the Persian religion, these texts are very relevant,[40] in the present study they will be largely ignored because they have nothing to add to a reconstruction of Iranian ideas.

In the selection, organisation and interpretation of the passages, some simple rules have been observed throughout. It may be useful to make these rules explicit here. First of all, as noted above, pseudo-Zoroastrian and comparable texts will only sparsely be referred to. When serious theories that make a connection with Iranian religions have been voiced, the passages will of course be discussed. The Western biography of Zoroaster, for instance, in which the Iranian prophet is turned into a king of Bactria, the son of Semiramis and the rival of Ninus, will not be discussed at length, because it is precisely a Western invention. The same is true for the related story, that Zoroaster was killed by lightning and that his bones and ashes are kept in esteem by the Persians.[41]

In the second place, this book is not concerned with religious influence. Therefore, those texts which present ideas and images that are reminiscent of Iranian ideas, but do not make an explicit connection with Zoroaster, the Magi, or anything else related to Iran will not be discussed. Our only interest at the moment are those texts which make this explicit connection. There is a sizeable amount of literature on the subject of possible Zoroastrian influences on Greek philosophy, Hellenistic and Judaeo-Christian religious traditions, Gnosticism and Manicheism, ranging from serious and sober discussions of possibilities to far-fetched pan-Iranian claims.[42] The serious contributions to this literature are usually inventories of mutual interests, points of contact and mythical and doctrinal comparisons. Such an approach—within certain limits—is entirely valid, but it is a different subject of research. A survey of information on Iranian religions available to Greeks and Romans is in a way a preliminary contribution to the study of religious interaction and influence.

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[40] Cf. Beck's judgment in *HZ* III, 564-565.

[41] Most passages relating these stories can be found in *Mages* II, 41-62.

A third principle that needs to be stressed concerns the use of comparative materials. It is customary among Iranianists to use a broad selection of materials, ranging from Vedic literature to contemporary Zoroastrian practices. Classicists and ancient historians may be surprised or even irritated by such a procedure. The main reason why this procedure is common lies in the fact that the ancient textual sources are limited and undatable and that students of Zoroastrianism have to supplement their knowledge for the relevant periods with every piece of evidence that may be even remotely relevant. This is not done in order to support the suggestion that nothing ever changed, but is at present the only way of making sense of otherwise unintelligible information. Thus, in the present book, not only the Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Persian and New Persian sources will be considered, but also contemporary rituals of Zoroastrians, Mandaeans and Yezidis, Vedic literature, Ossetic traditions etc. This requires a certain patience from those who are accustomed to a substantial body of datable texts. It may be noted, however, that most scholars restrain themselves in the use of very late sources. One sometimes encounters a hypercritical attitude among specialists in scriptural traditions, who reject the evidence from Pahlavi literature, because the Pahlavi books are ninth-century texts. This betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the well-founded assumption, shared by all Iranianists, that the Pahlavi books were edited, not composed, in the ninth century.

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[42] For the literature on Greek philosophy, cf. ch. 1.5; for all other subjects, cf. the detailed discussions and references in *HZ* III, 361-490. Out and out pan-Iranianism is something of the past, although there still is no shortage of ill-founded claims.

Finally, an attempt will be made to pay more attention to contextual interpretations of the passages. This involves the tracing of literary traditions, the recognition of the importance of cultural patterns in descriptions of foreigners in general and Iranians in particular and the philosophical and religious backgrounds of the authors. Evidently, a Christian bishop and a Neo-Platonic philosopher will have different outlooks on the cult of fire. An author who has visited an Iranian sanctuary is likely to give a representation of Zoroastrian daily life that differs from the descriptions of palatial opulence that are based on popular imaginations of Oriental splendour.

In many cases, contexts will remain problematic, either because the source of a particular passage is unknown, or because it is impossible to relate the information to our present state of knowledge of ancient Zoroastrianism. In many texts, moreover, the information has a Zoroastrian flavour, but does not bear closer scrutiny because the information appears to have been manipulated to suit the interest of the author. In those cases, a 'maximum interpretation' will be given, stressing to what extent at most the sources reflect Iranian realities. There will be cases where such an interpretation exceeds the limits of likelihood and where a more moderate attempt at interpretation or a *non liquet* in the end will be more satisfactory, but the present state of knowledge on Iranian religions is such that anything that can possibly contribute to our image of Zoroastrianism must be considered.

3. *Alterity and Classical Orientalism: Persians in Graeco-Roman Literature*

Ancient Greece did not produce objective observers of foreign cultures or, if they existed at all, they did not write down their observations. It was not different from Sasanian Iran, Renaissance Venice or Victorian Britain in this respect. On the other hand, not all Greek writers were total fantasists who conjured up in their biased minds non-existent barbarian races that served no other purpose than amusement or the clarification of what it meant to be Greek. Between these two extremes—total reliability and total imagination—the main part of Greek literature on foreign cultures will have to be situated. Again, this is not different for ancient Greece than for most other cultures and periods. Comparative materials for the demonstration of these two extremes and the enormous territory between them are easy to find and frequently explored.[43]

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the possibilities and limits of Classical reports on barbarian peoples and customs. This is connected with the realisation of the importance of views of the entire world and views of the entire history in the description of particular places, peoples and events. It is also connected with the differences in perception of "selves" and "others" and with the interplay between myth, history and geography. The focus of this innovative work is on "alterity" or on the image of the "Other" in Classical literature and the implications of this concept for those who, like the present writer, want to extract from Greek (and Latin) literature the realities of a barbarian nation.

The notion of "alterity" is a subject of great importance in contemporary philosophical and anthropological discourse.[44] It has therefore assumed many meanings and different associations, which go far beyond the aim of the present study. The notion has also been applied in books pertaining to the ancient world in general[45] and to the Persians.[46]

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[43] Good examples are provided by the Mediaeval and Renaissance imaginative accounts of the Mongols: C. Burnett & P.G. Dalché, 'Attitudes towards the Mongols in Medieval Literature: the XXII Kings of Gog and Magog from the Court of Frederick II to Jean de Mandeville', *Viator* 22 (1991), 153-167; A. Klopprogge, *Ursprung und Ausprägung des abendländischen Mongolenbildes im 13. Jahrhundert. Ein Versuch zur Ideengeschichte des Mittelalters* (AsForsch 122), Wiesbaden 1993. For an overview of these and related subjects from different backgrounds, cf. S.S. Schwartz (ed.), *Implicit Understandings. Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, Cambridge 1994, with an annotated bibliography on pp. 587-601.

[44] Examples and introductions can be found in R. Corbey & J.Th. Leerssen (eds.), *Alterity, Identity, Image. Selves and Others in Society and Scholarship* (Amsterdam Studies in Cultural Identity 1), Amsterdam 1991; F. Affergan, *Exotisme et altérité. Essai sur les fondements d'une critique de l'anthropologie*, Paris 1987.

[45] For instance J.H. Blok, *The Early Amazons. Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 120), Leiden 1995, esp. 63-64; 83-93; 126-143; Versnel, *Inconsistencies* II, 106-110 (both with references); A. Dihle, *Die Griechen und die Fremde*, München 1994; W. Nippel, *Griechen,*

There are several areas that have been singled out as focus of research on the self-definition of Greeks, in which the notion of alterity emerges with some clarity. One of these areas is the diet of other peoples.[47] Based on the diet of other peoples, general systems of cultural classification can be grasped. Thus, one can encounter the image of milk-drinking civilisations, which express theories of peaceful cultures and peoples living close to nature and in harmony with the gods.[48] On the other side of the spectrum we meet those who eat human flesh or raw meat, the savages.[49] These two images, the noble and the savage barbarian, the vegetarian and the cannibalistic stranger, correspond to Greek theories of cultural classification. These divisions have found an expression in geographical as well as climatic theories. The common Greek view of the world places both the noble and the savage barbarians at the greatest distance from the world's centre, at the edges of the world. There, it does not matter much whether it is South or North, the edges of the world are connected and so are the peoples localised there. Theories concerning the climate in different parts of the world amount much to the same.[50]

Barbaren und "Wilde": alte Geschichte und Sozialanthropologie, Frankfurt 1990. A copious bibliography—on the related topic of the opposition Greek-barbarian—is available in W. Speyer & I. Opelt, 'Barbar I', *RAC* Suppl. I.5/6 (1992), 811-895, cols. 892-895.

[46] E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford 1989 (1991^2); P. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience. From the Archaic Period to the Age of Xenophon*, Baltimore/London 1994.

[47] For an example from the Iranian world, cf. C. Bromberger, 'Identité alimentaire et altérité culturelle dans le Nord de l'Iran: le froid, le chaud, le sexe et le reste', in: *Identité alimentaire et altérité culturelle*, Neuchâtel 1985, 5-34.

[48] F. Graf, 'Milch, Honig und Wein. Zum Verständnis der Libation im griechischen Ritual', in: G. Piccaluga (ed.), *Perennitas. Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich*, Rome 1980, 209-221; Versnel, *Inconsistencies II*, 107-109 (with references). The same idea can also be found in Pahlavi literature: cf. *MX* 16.9-11: *cē paydāg kū mardōm ī pad Arzah ud Sawah ud Fradadafš ud Wīdadafš ud Worūbaršt ud Worūjaršt hēnd xwarišn pēm ī gōspandān ud gāwān any xwarišn nē xwarēnd*. "For it is evident that the people who live in Arzah and Sawah and Fradadafš and Wīdadafš and Worūbaršt and Worūjaršt do not eat anything else than the milk of sheep and cows." The various continents mentioned are the six other continents, excluding the central continent, *Xwanīras*, where the Iranians and their neighbours live.

[49] For the Greek perceptions of eating of raw meat and cannibalism (but in a Greek context), cf. D. Obbink, 'Dionysos Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation', in: T.H. Carpenter & C.A. Faraone (eds.), *Masks of Dionysus*, Ithaca/London 1993, 65-86, pp. 68-75.

[50] J.S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought. Geography, Exploration, and Fiction*, Princeton 1992, 45-81 and *passim*.

If we move one circle closer to the Greeks, we come upon the peoples who were within sight of them, but only just: the Scythians. The Scythians have been the subject of one of the most elaborate discussions of the Other in Greek ethnography, the work of F. Hartog.[51] Traditionally, Herodotus' Scythian *logos* had been used as a source for Scythian history and culture. It thus served as the main comparative source for the evaluation and interpretation of the mass of archaeological data uncovered from Scythian burial mounds.[52] Herodotus' description of the Scythians was also used to reconstruct a development that could connect the Scythians with the Sarmatians, Alans, and the Caucasian Ossetes.[53] Hartog rejects this approach, by pointing at the arbitrary nature of the procedure: if archaeology confirms Herodotus' descriptions, Herodotus is thought to be a keen observer, if archaeology does not confirm Herodotus' description, Herodotus is said to suffer from misconceptions or bad information.[54] It is clear that such a procedure fails to give an interpretation of Herodotus' text or of the procedures he applied. Since this is Hartog's interest, he rejects the information from archaeology and from later Scytho-Sarmatian traditions altogether, focusing instead on the way Herodotus presents the Scythians. Hartog therefore treats the Scythians as an imaginary people and stresses the differences between Greeks and "imaginary" Scythians, mainly the difference between a sedentary and a nomadic people. This, in turn, fails to explain anything concerning the Scythians. In his essay on the representation of the Other, we meet a Herodotus who is entirely different from the Herodotus we know from other treatments of the ethnographic parts of the *Histories*: Hartog presents us with a teller of tales, predating the crafts of ethnographer or historian. His description of the Scythians is based on an interplay between Herodotus and his audience and is grounded in the imaginative expectations Herodotus and his fellow-Greeks had on the basis of an imperfect knowledge of a far-flung people.

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[51] F. Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote. Essai sur la représentation de l'autre*, Paris 1980 (1991^2); cf. also *id.*, 'La mort de l'Autre: les funérailles des rois scythes', in: G. Gnoli & J.P. Vernant (eds.), *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes*, Cambridge-Paris 1982, 143-154. For a recent application of the ideas of Hartog and others, cf. for instance V. Gray, 'Herodotus and the Rhetoric of Otherness', *AJP* 116 (1995), 185-211.

[52] For a conventional presentation of Scythian and related affairs, cf., for instance, M.A. Levi, *I nomadi alla frontiera. I popoli delle steppe e l'antico mondo grecoromano*, Roma 1989.

[53] Cf. particularly G. Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée I: L'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens*, Paris 1968, 446-452; *id.*, *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour*, Paris 1979, *passim*.

[54] "Les erreurs seront probablement mises sur le compte d'une mauvaise information, d'une insuffisance d'un esprit critique, ou de la naïveté. Les "rencontres" seront au contraire mises au compte de ses qualités d'observateur, de son absence de prévention... Si le débit l'emporte sur le crédit, on dira qu'il a mal décrit, si, inversement, il est créditeur, on estimera qu'il est témoin véridique." (*Miroir d'Hérodote*, 23).

The weak spot in Hartog's procedure has been pointed out many times: the Scythians were *not* an imaginary people. From a methodological point of view, his easy rejection of the non-Herodotean textual and material data as a source for the interpretation of Herodotus has been questioned several times. It would also be interesting to know even approximately where Herodotus invented and where he reported genuine information. Hartog's work has therefore come under massive attack.[55] But Hartog's interests are of a different background: those who criticise Hartog are interested in the possibilities of reconstructing non-Greek cultures from the *Histories*; Hartog is interested in the orientation of the *Histories* as such, and particularly in the process of communicating aspects of non-Greek cultures to a Greek audience.

With this goal, he has given an overview of a "rhetoric of otherness" which seems important for anyone engaging in the study of Herodotus and similar authors, even if one would reject the outcome of the investigations as a whole.[56] Hartog singles out six areas of interest: difference and inversion; comparison and analogy; the miraculous; translation and classification; description and representation and the excluded third. By focusing on these six areas, he is able to present some general principles of communication and interpretation of non-Greek cultures for a Greek audience. The *Histories* are not a source-book of ancient ethnography alone, but also a representation of Greekness, a source-book of Greek self-definitions. This comes out with great clarity in the fact that Greekness is the norm and the measure for the descriptions of the non-Greek cultures. Whether Herodotus contrasts Greek practices with foreign practices or recognises aspects the Greeks shared with non-Greek peoples, his frame of reference is a shared Greekness which he and his audience lived. The descriptions of the beliefs and practices of non-Greeks can therefore be used for the reconstruction of these cultures, but only if we pay ample attention to the reasons why these customs caught Herodotus' attention and with what purpose he intended to communicate them to his audience. These reasons must be sought at least partly in the creation of a view of the world that was attractive to a Greek audience and was capable of making the mass of available information on those who were not Greek manageable and inoffensive.

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[55] Thus, for instance, G. Casadio, 'Non desiderare la donna d'altri: la famiglia secondo natura dei barbari', in: L. de Finis (ed.), *Civiltà classica e mondo dei barbari. Due modelli a confronto*, Trento 1991, 103-135; W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The Liar School of Herodotos*, Amsterdam 1993, 191-226.

[56] Hartog, *Miroir d'Hérodote*, 225-269.

The main notion that came to express this world-view is the notion of the barbarian. Originally this word simply meant someone who speaks a foreign, incomprehensible language. It thus came to serve as a primary referent for the definition of what constituted Greekness: speaking Greek. From this rather innocent usage, the term developed into a word expressing the entire human race with the exception of the Greeks, who were different from the Greeks in all areas of human culture.[57] In several instances, this amounted to an invention of characteristics by a process of inversion: the barbarians were typically engaged in all the vices that contrasted with the Greek virtues.[58]

For the present study, there are two important elements in the development of the antithesis between Greek and barbarian. First of all, it is commonly assumed that the notion of Greek ethnic self-consciousness, though present in earlier periods, was intensified and elaborated as a result of the Persian wars.[59] The Persians thus came to represent the barbarians *par excellence*. In the second place, most barbarians known to the mainland Greeks were their slaves. This led to the familiar characterisation of barbarians as servile and obsessed with despotism and the characterisation of the Greeks as democrats and lovers of freedom. Freedom more than anything else came to represent the Greek cultural ideal, despotism and submission the nature of the barbarians.[60]

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[57] Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 3-13.

[58] This process is of course not confined to the Greeks. Hall has drawn attention to comparative systems in Chinese and Indian societies: *Inventing the Barbarian*, 4-5. The Iranian situation is different from the Greek situation, in that it privileges (like Christianity) *religious* distinctions. Cf. S. Shaked, 'Zoroastrians and Others in Sasanian Iran', Paper read at the Conference "Late Antiquity and Early Islam", London 1993; A. de Jong, 'Plutarch and the Zoroastrian Devil-worshippers,' paper read at the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies, Cambridge 1995.

[59] Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 6.

A most influential expression of this polarity is Aeschylus' *Persians*, but the notion of Oriental despotism as opposed to Greek freedom was constantly elaborated upon and expanded into new regions. Many of the areas of interest to the Greeks were divided along these lines and along a simple division between barbarian excess and Greek modesty: Persian decadence came to represent the opposite of Greek moderation, Persian self-indulgence the opposite of Greek austerity, Persian lasciviousness the opposite of Greek self-restraint. Perhaps the most powerful image was that of the Persian queens and their intrigues, their shadow-control over the affairs of the Persian empire, through the extraordinary influence they exercised over the princes.[61]

These stereotypes are not confined to representations of Oriental palaces, but they also underlie many passages that claim to provide information on the customs of the Persians. They are the expression of a deep-rooted cultural awareness which cannot but have had a strong impact on the perception of reality. The perpetuation of these images in Greek literature represents one of the aspects of what may be called Greek Orientalism: stereotyped representations of an Oriental people in order to activate Greek cultural awareness and a sense of moral as well as physical superiority.

In the present study we will frequently come across situations where the mechanisms introduced here will manifest themselves in full force: the subject of Iranian next-of-kin marriages is perhaps the most obvious example, but this variety of Greek Orientalism is also evident in some reports on funerary traditions, on mourning customs, and on the rules of purity. With regard to the specific domain of religious beliefs, however, we encounter a slightly different situation. For here the main trend in Greek writing is *not* contrastive or imaginative, but on the contrary harmonising and reflective. Of all the manifest areas of Greek self-definition, the religious domain stands out in almost total blandness. In her survey, Hall has pointed at sun-worship as an aspect of religious alterity, but this is only valid for a limited period of Greek literary production.[62] Human sacrifice is also a likely candidate, but the Persians were rarely accused of it.[63]

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[60] Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, *passim*.

[61] Cf. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Exit Atossa: Images of Women in Greek Historiography on Persia', in A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity*, London 1983, 20-33.

In the Greek references to Persian and other Iranian religions, however, we can perceive some persistent stereotyped images. One of these is the aniconic worship of the divinities, and the importance of elements and luminaries in their religion as a whole. Another is of course the worship of the king. Most often, however, the Persians are simply represented as performing Greek rituals for Greek divinities. In this respect, most authors follow the ancient tradition, evident from Homer, of attributing identical practices to Greek and non-Greek peoples alike.

4. *The* interpretatio graeca *of Iranian divinities*[64]

Many Greek passages on Iranian religions refer to the deities in question with Greek divine names. They also naturally describe the rituals and customs in terms taken from their own religious vocabulary. Quite often, this is where the interest of the passage for Zoroastrian studies ends. It can by no means be deduced that these texts refer to actual Zoroastrian practices, because the practice of attributing Greek religious behaviour to non-Greeks is commonly found in these narratives. Thus, when Cyrus hears the sound of thunder and responds "Greatest Zeus, we shall follow you!" (*Cyropaedia* 7.1.3), this is not an act of Zoroastrian heterodoxy (thunder is a *daēvic* noise), but an imaginative representation of Greek behaviour attributed to a Persian king. Some deities also appear to be inventions of the authors: an example is perhaps the Persian god of silence mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus.[65]

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[62] Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 143-146.

[63] Herodotus, *Histories* 3.35; 7.114; Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 13.171D; Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Fluviis* 23.1-2 (Armenians). Cf. ch. 4.2.1, for a brief discussion.

[64] For questions pertaining to *interpretatio* in the ancient world, cf. G. Wissowa, 'Interpretatio Romana: Römische Götter im Barbarenlande', *ARW* 19 (1916-19), 1-49; other earlier studies are summed up in G. Vandebeek, *De Interpretatio Graeca van de Isisfiguur* (Studia Hellenistica 4), Leuven 1946; more modern theoretical reflections are P. Barié, 'Interpretatio als religionspsychologisches Problem', *Der altsprachliche Unterricht* 28.2 (1985), 17-26; R. Bloch, 'Interpretatio', in: R. Bloch *et alii*, *Recherches sur les religions de l'Italie antique* (Hautes études du monde gréco-romain 7), Genève 1976, 1-42; W. Schenk, 'Interpretatio Graeca – Interpretatio Romana. Der hellenistische Synkretismus als semiotisches Problem', in: P. Schmitter & H.W. Schmitz (eds.), *Innovationen in Zeichentheorien. Kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien zur Kreativität* (Materialien zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaften und der Semiotik 4), Münster 1989, 83-121. The rich Egyptian materials are treated, for instance, in: J. Bergman, 'Ein Beitrag zur Interpretatio Graeca: Ägyptische Götter in griechischer Übertragung', in: S.S. Hartman (ed.), *Syncretism* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 3), Stockholm 1969, 207-227.

If we leave out these texts, many passages remain for which it is reasonable to suppose that the Greek divine names do in fact refer to Iranian deities. This is connected with the procedure commonly known as *interpretatio graeca*: the "translation" of foreign divine names (and practices) into Greek divine names (and practices). Such a procedure, as all acts of translation, obviously is a complicated process, involving the personal religion of the translator, the religion he shares with his fellow Greeks and the divinity whose name is translated. Ultimately, the question is one of understanding. In the previous section, we have come across certain limits to the understanding of foreign cultures in Greek literature, associated with literature on the Other. *Interpretatio graeca* is part of that same mentality: it produces a view of the world that is based on a Greek outlook on religion and culture, by reducing a multitude of foreign gods to familiar structures.

It is a rare occurrence that Greek authors frankly state that they do not know how to interpret a certain foreign divinity. There is a good example in Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertatio* 2.8: "The Celts worship Zeus, but the Celtic statue of Zeus is a high oak. The Paeonians worship the Sun, but the Paeonian statue of the Sun is a small disk on a long pole. The Arabs worship <a god>, *but I do not know who he is*. But I have seen <his> statue: it was a square stone." But passages like this are seldom found; the passage from Maximus offers a precious insight into the limits of understanding.

In those passages where the divine names are "translated," there are two general difficulties. First of all, it is impossible to formulate general rules of *interpretatio*: the translation may be based on the function of the divinity interpreted (sun-god; highest god; war-god etc.), on his or her iconography, on the meaning of the name, and even on the similarity of the name to Greek names. In the second place, *interpretatio* is not a cultural rule. It is frequently impossible, therefore, to formulate equations that would be valid for all Greek authors.

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[65] Ammianus Marcellinus 21.13.4. This passage is concerned with secrecy in military affairs among the Persians. For a similar story, cf. Curtius Rufus 4.5.5-6. A divinity of silence is not known among the Iranians. In Neo-Platonic texts, we do find references to "divine silence" (*θεία σιωπή*) and in the Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi, a hypostatised silence (*Sige*) occurs: cf. P.W. van der Horst, 'Silent Prayer in Antiquity', *NUMEN* 41 (1994), 1-25, pp. 11-12.

It is moreover important to be precise. There are two distinct processes of *interpretatio*, which need to be discussed separately. The first of these concerns acts of interpretation by the worshippers themselves, that is within religious systems (in which the divinity is incorporated into an existing system). The second concerns interpretations by outsiders, in descriptions of (foreign) religious traditions. That there is a difference between the two is evident, for instance, from the fact that the Anatolian divinity Sabazius is always identified with Zeus in the epigraphical evidence deriving from his actual cult, but almost always identified with Dionysus in the (most often overtly hostile) Greek literary references to his worshippers. In this case, there clearly is a difference between the interpretation of this divinity by those who worshipped him and by those who did not, and who regarded him almost exclusively with great suspicion and ridicule.[66] If we turn to the Iranian divinities in translation, another area needs to be distinguished: the *interpretatio iranica* of Greek divinities.

Interpretations of the first category, that is Iranian divinities incorporated in Greek or Anatolian religiosity, are rare. The best known case is that of Anāhitā, who is identified with Artemis (in various of her Anatolian manifestations) and with the Mother of the gods (cf. ch. 4.1.3). In this particular case, we know that it is indeed Anāhitā who is so identified, because she retained her Iranian name. This is not the case with the inscriptions attesting to a cult of a Persian Zeus, whose Iranian name is not given.[67] It is very likely that this is Ahura Mazdā, invoked together with Anatolian manifestations of Zeus. Such combined invocations are also attested for Anāhitā (e.g. together with Men or with Sabazios) and for the general groups of "gods of the Greeks and gods of the Persians."[68] A final case is the Iranian divinity Mithra, whose name is usually *not* translated.[69]

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[66] For the epigraphical and literary records of this divinity, cf. M.J. Vermaseren & E.N. Lane, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Sabazii (CCIS)* (EPRO 100), 3 vols., Leiden 1983-1989; for the imagery of Sabazios in literature, cf. especially Versnel, *Ter Unus*, 114-118; for a general overview, cf. S.E. Johnson, 'The Present State of Sabazios Research', *ANRW* II.17.3, Berlin-New York 1984, 1583-1613.

[67] Persian Zeus: *TAM* 5.1, nr. 267; Zeus of the Persians: inscription from Değişören in T. Drew-Bear, *Nouvelles inscriptions phrygiennes*, Zutphen 1978, 48.

These cases are comparatively transparent. Other inscriptions present more serious difficulties, for instance the inscription from Kalın Harman in Lydia dedicated to Apollo and Anaïtis the Lady.[70] The fact that Anaïtis is here called "the Lady" (κυρία) may be connected with similar appellations of Anāhitā in Zoroastrian settings,[71] which has led most interpreters to see in Apollo a reference to Mithra.[72] The evidence for the possible translation of Mithra as Apollo, however, comes from sources with an entirely different background (literary sources and the inscriptions from Commagene) and some caution therefore is necessary in the interpretation of this particular inscription.

The richest materials for equations between Iranian and Greek divinities are the inscriptions from the royal cult at Commagene.[73] Here we find three identifications of Iranian divinities: Ahura Mazdā and Zeus; Mithra and Apollo, Helios and Hermes; Verethraghna and Heracles and Ares. These composite divinities originate in a wilful syncretistic effort from king Antiochus I of Commagene himself. It has been suggested that astrological speculations underlie some of the identifications.[74] It is at any rate problematic that a single Iranian divinity such as Mithra can be associated with three distinct Greek gods. This goes beyond more customary procedures of *interpretatio graeca* and it is therefore difficult to use the identifications from the Commagenian pantheon in the evaluation of other *interpretationes graecae*.

If we turn now to the Iranian materials relevant for the process of interpretation, we also encounter several problems. First of all, there are some Greek inscriptions from Iranian lands, which are in all likelihood inscriptions from Greek individuals concerning Greek divinities. Even these are sometimes interpreted as evidence for the Greek interpretation of Iranian divinities, but this seems difficult to maintain.[75]

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[68] L. Robert, 'Malédictions funéraires grecques', *CRAI* 1978, 241-289, pp. 279-286.

[69] For instance in the inscription from Faraša, *CIMRM* 19, and possibly a fragmentary inscription from Değişören: S. Mitchell, *The Inscriptions of North Galatia* (RECAM II), Oxford 1981, no. 404. Both inscriptions mention the name Mithras and are not to be connected with the Mithraic mysteries. A more dubious case is an inscription to Mithras the Sun from Savçılar, *CIMRM* 23, which may or may not be connected with the Mithraic mysteries: cf. *HZ* III, 261.

[70] Diakonoff, 'Artemidi Anaeiti Anestesen', nr. 22.

[71] MP *ML'T* (*bānūg*); Arm *tikin*; cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 257, n. 44.

[72] Thus (cautiously) *HZ* III, 245-247, and cf. the index of that volume, s.v. 'Apollo.'

[73] Waldmann, *Kultreformen*, and *Mazdaismus*, both *passim*.

[74] *HZ* III, 321-349.

Several identifications of Greek divinities appear to be *interpretationes iranicae* of Greek gods rather than *interpretationes graecae* of Iranian gods. In view of the general considerations mentioned above, the evidence from such interpretations cannot automatically be reversed to produce the Greek interpretations. For these Iranian interpretations, there are examples from Central Asia (e.g. Nikē-*οανινδο*)[76] but especially interesting ones from Anatolia and Mesopotamia: the inscription from the Leto-sanctuary in Xanthus and the Heracles-statue from Mesene.[77] The inscription from Xanthus makes the following Iranian equations: Apollo = *xšaθrapati* (Mithra);[78] the Nymphs = the Ahurānis.[79] The Heracles-statue from Mesene presents the equations Heracles = Verethraghna; Apollo = Tīri. In the case of the inscriptions from Xanthus, we can be reasonably certain that the information is relevant to the Lycian religion; the Greek and the Aramaic versions of the inscription reflect this Lycian religion in an *interpretatio graeca* and an *interpretatio iranica*. In the case of the Heracles-statue, I would also suggest that the Parthian inscription is an *interpretatio iranica* of Greek divinities.

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[75] Some examples are the Greek Heracles-inscription from Karafto (P. Bernard, 'Héraclès, les grottes de Karafto et le sanctuaire du Mont Sambulos en Iran', *StIr* 9 (1980), 301-324), the Greek inscriptions from Persepolis, dedicated to Zeus Megistos, Artemis, Apollo, Athena Basileia and Helios (J. Wiesehöfer, *Die "dunklen Jahrhunderte" der Persis* (Zetemata 90), München 1994, 72-73) and the Hyrcanian inscription mentioning Sarapis (L. Robert, 'Une inscription hellénistique d'Iran', *Hellenica* XI-XII (1960), 85-91).

[76] *HZ* III, 161.

[77] For the inscription from Xanthus, cf. *Fouilles de Xanthos VI: La stèle trilingue du Létôon*, Paris 1979. For the Heracles-statue, cf. W.I. Al-Salihi, 'The Weary Hercules of Mesene', *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987), 159-167; F.A. Pennacchietti, 'L'iscrizione bilingue greco-partica dell'Eracle di Seleucia', *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987), 169-185; P. Bernard, 'Vicissitudes au gré de l'histoire d'une statue en bronze d'Héraclès entre Séleucie du Tigre et la Mésène', *JS* 1990, 3-68; E. Morano, 'Contributi all'interpretazione della bilingue greco-partica dell'Eracle di Seleucia', *PFECIS*, 229-238.

[78] For this equation, cf. A.D.H. Bivar, 'An Iranian Sarapis' *BAI NS* 2 (1988), 11-17 and the materials presented by E. Lipiński, 'Šadday, Šadraphe et Satrapes', *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 8 (1995), 247-274.

[79] H. Humbach, 'Die aramäischen Nymphen von Xanthos', *Die Sprache* 27 (1981), 30-32.

These two inscriptions thus present us with a double equation of the Greek divinity Apollo: Mithra and Tīri.[80] These two divinities are never equated in Iranian religious traditions. The identifications appear to be due to their functions; Mithra is interpreted as Apollo because of their shared solar functions, Tīri is interpreted as Apollo because of their function as guardian of writing, or because they are both represented with a bow.

With regard to the literary evidence, the problems are equally serious. Most frequently, the Greek authors merely give Greek divine names (Zeus, Artemis, Aphrodite, Athena, Apollo etc.) and do not provide the Iranian name. Sometimes, they only give the Iranian name and do not offer an interpretation (this happens mainly with Mithras, but also Ōmanos, Anadatos etc.). Perhaps the most disturbing case is Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes*, where he talks of three goddesses (Athena, Hera and Artemis Persikē) who are *all* interpreted as Anāhitā in most modern works.[81]

There are some interpretations of divinities which are commonly adopted. Thus, most scholars would seem to agree on the translation of Ahura Mazdā as Zeus; Anāhitā as Aphrodite (in some literary sources) or Artemis (in literary and epigraphic sources); and Hades as Angra Mainyu. Some translations are more debatable, because more than one Iranian divinity is a suitable candidate: is the Sun for instance Mithra or Hvar? Is the earth Zam or Ārmaiti? Are the winds Vayu or Vāta?

It is evident that for several of these questions, only suggestions can be made. In the absence of more corroborative materials, several suggestions of identifications must be viewed with great caution. Examples of these suggestions are the identification of Hera with Ārmaiti[82] or the suggestion that the mention of Thetis and the Nereids in Herodotus, *Histories* 7.191, could refer to Iranian divinities.[83]

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[80] In the interpretation of a particular passage from Polyaenus (*Stratagemata* 7.12), the divinity Apollo has therefore been interpreted as Tištrya/Tīri or as Mithra: cf. ch. 4.1.5 for some considerations.

[81] Cf. ch. 4.1.3.

[82] *HZ* II, 220.

[83] M. Smith in E.J. Bickerman & H. Tadmor, 'Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis, and the Magi', *Athenaeum* 56 (1978), 239-261, p. 250, n. 57.

5. *Pseudo-Zoroastrian Literature and the* Mages Hellénisés

Zoroaster in antiquity was not only understood to have been the founder of the religion of the Persians, the first Magus, but also functioned as one of the main icons of Oriental wisdom, on a par with Moses, Orpheus and Hermes Trismegistus.[84] To judge from the surviving literature, he was considered to have been the inventor of astrology and magic and to have written books on these subjects. He was also the founder of the order of the Magi who were responsible for the transmission of the knowledge he had imparted to them. These Magi in their turn, or sometimes Zoroaster himself, instructed Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato and other prominent Greek philosophers.

It is not very surprising, therefore, to find in Greek and Latin literature a large amount of texts which discuss this image of Zoroaster and the Magi, and a considerable number of texts that go under the name of Zoroaster or one of the Magi. These texts have been collected and interpreted by Bidez and Cumont in the two volumes of their magisterial *Mages hellénisés*.

Underlying the collection of materials in these volumes, however, is a theory that is in need of a critical discussion. For Bidez and Cumont did not confine themselves to a collection of the relevant texts and a discussion of what would today be perceived as creative appropriations of Iranian names and things for the promulgation of Greek or Hellenistic ideas. They presumed, on the contrary, that most of the literature that survives is the product of "Hellenised Magi." These were Zoroastrians whose traditional religiosity had changed due to pervasive influences from two distinct areas: Babylonia and Greece.

In the first pages of the first volume of the *Mages hellénisés*, Bidez and Cumont have given an outline of their reconstruction of the history of the "Magusaean" communities: here we meet slightly Zoroastrianised communities of expatriate Iranians, who adopted only a few elements from Zoroaster's new doctrine, but mainly remained nature-worshippers guided by their priests, the Magusaeans. These communities had lost their native Iranian languages, but spoke Aramaic. They were expatriate communities in a very special sense: Iranians who had settled first in Babylonia and moved from there to Anatolia. In the course of their wanderings, their traditional religion first came under the influence of Babylonian religious traditions: here they acquired the notion of fatalism, an obsession with astrology and with millenary schemes. Once they had settled in Anatolia, they came under the influence of Stoicism, which profoundly changed their inherited conception of the cult of the elements and provided them with a philosophical *jargon* with which they could communicate their learning to the Greek-speaking world.

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[84] Cf. particularly G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes. A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Cambridge 1986.

This reconstruction implied that all Greek and Latin texts mentioning or referring to Persian doctrine would be of interest, either because they could show the presence of "genuine" Iranian ideas in the Greek-speaking world, or because they could show how the Iranians living abroad had changed these Iranian ideas and transformed them into a new system.[85]

Les mages hellénisés was the natural result of Cumont's earlier attempts to connect the Mithraic mysteries with Iran and of his interests in the interrelations between the various Oriental religions in the Hellenistic and Roman world.[86] This is perhaps to be witnessed at its clearest in his influential article on Magusaean eschatology.[87] Here Cumont brought together three distinct sources: Zoroastrian eschatological works, the "Hymns of the Magi" in Dio Chrysostomus, *Oration* 36.39-62, and a Mithraic relief from Dieburg on which he recognised the myth of Phaeton (*CIMRM* 1247). By combining these sources, Cumont could show that an Iranian conception of eschatology (the destruction of evil by a fiery flood) had been inherited by the Magusaeans, who connected it with the Stoic doctrine of the *ecpyrosis*. Since Stoic philosophers use myths in the explanation and promulgation of their philosophy, the stoicised Magusaeans used a myth to explain their view of the end of the world: the myth of Phaeton. How successful they were in this, was then evident from the Mithraic relief from Dieburg, which showed that the myth of Phaeton was part of the Mithraic doctrine. The representation of the myth of Phaeton on the Dieburg-relief was also claimed as evidence for the fact that Mithraism indeed grew out of the doctrines of the Magusaeans.[88]

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[85] Cf. for instance, *Mages* I, 3-4: "L'image fallacieuse qu'ils nous présentent du prophète iranien est en partie celle que se faisaient de lui certains Mages eux-mêmes et si, en d'autres cas, elle a été déformée par les écrivains helléniques, c'est sous l'empire de préoccupations qu'il importe de connaître."

[86] As evidenced by his *TMMM*, *Mysteries of Mithra* and *Les religions Orientales*.

[87] F. Cumont, 'La fin du monde selon les mages occidentaux', *RHR* 103 (1931), 29-96; cf. also *id.*, 'Zoroastre chez les Grecs et la doctrine Zervaniste', *RHLR* 8 (1922), 1-12.

Essentially, the idea that the Hellenised Magi were responsible for the corpus of pseudo-Zoroastrian literature was a suggestion meant to explain the profusion of works that went under the name of Zoroaster or (one of) the Magi and to explain the possible links between Greek and Iranian ideas. More recent appreciations of these problems have shown the basic idea of the *Mages hellénisés* to be untenable. Some doubts were already cast by Nock in his review of the work.[89] Even more reservations were expressed by Momigliano in his Trevelyan Lectures.[90] The most recent investigation of the texts collected by Bidez and Cumont has definitively ruined the idea of the Magusaean background of the Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha by showing that there is no coherence, no system of "Magusaean" thought, but only a disparate number of texts written for different purposes by different authors and belonging in their entirety to the Greek cultural milieu.[91]

The authenticity of these Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha was already debated in antiquity. Porphyrius for instance (*Life of Plotinus* 16) clearly stated that the gnostic treatise under the name Zoroaster was a mere invention and had nothing to do with the "real" Zoroaster.[92] This, it seems, is true of *all* texts going under the name of Zoroaster or Ostanes. It is equally true of much literature concerned with the teachings of these two famous Magi. The background to this situation is complex but well documented. It is firmly connected with the growing sentiments among the Greeks that the Oriental cultures were the main source of wisdom, the place where the origins of philosophy could be found.[93] Around this idea, a large corpus of texts took shape that made connections between some outstanding examples of Oriental wisdom and the main protagonists of the history of Greek philosophy.[94] These claims again were not at all uncontroversial: the proem to Diogenes Laertius' description of the various philosophers and philosophical schools appears to be directed against those who have pleaded for a barbarian origin of philosophy (cf. ch. 3.4). In modern scholarship the same trends may be perceived. Some scholars have argued for an important contribution to Greek philosophy from Iranian religious traditions. Others have rejected the idea of such an influence out of hand.[95]

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[88] Cf. Beck, *HZ* III, 539-548, for a critical discussion.

[89] A.D. Nock, 'Greeks and Magi', *JRS* 30 (1940), 191-198 (=*Essays* 2.516-526).

[90] A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom. The Limits of Hellenization*, Cambridge 1975, 141-149.

[91] Beck, 'Thus spake not Zarathuštra', *HZ* III, 491-565.

[92] Cf. for this passage M. Tardieu, 'Les Gnostiques dans la *Vie de Plotin*', in: *Porphyre. La vie de Plotin* II (Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique 16), Paris 1992, 503-546 with bibliography on pp. 547-563.

[93] For this idea, cf. P. Pilhofer, *Presbyteron Kreitton. Der Altersbeweis der jüdischen und christlichen Apologeten und seine Vorgeschichte* (WUNT 2.39), Tübingen 1990, 17-141.

It is difficult to decide on the factuality of the contacts between Iranian and Greek mentalities. The longstanding suggestion that the wisdom of the Orient for the greater part *only* existed in the minds of the Greek philosophers[96] is too easy on any count.[97] There clearly was an interest in Oriental wisdom among the Greeks; in some cases, this led to adaptations of Oriental ideas, in others to popular fantasies. Both these subjects, however, fall outside the scope of the present book.

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[94] Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom, passim*; Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes, passim*.

[95] A distinction must be made between those who have argued carefully for such connections and those who have simply posited incredulous claims of total dependence of Greek on, for instance, Iranian ideas. Among the former group one can think of M.L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford 1971 and various contributions by P. Kingsley. An example of the latter category would be R. Afnan, *Zoroaster's Influence on Greek Thought*, New York 1965. For the difficulties some scholars have with the notion of Iranian (or general Oriental) influence on Greek philosophy, cf. Kingsley, 'Greeks, Shamans and Magi.'

[96] As was suggested by Festugière, *Rev.Herm.Tris*. I, 19-44, and by Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom, passim*.

[97] Cf. the detailed criticisms in Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi.'

CHAPTER TWO

VIEWS OF ZOROASTRIAN HISTORY

1. *Introduction: the problem*

The study of the history of Zoroastrianism is a discipline involving great efforts of speculation and imagination. It is and has been for a long time an academic battlefield divided in radically opposed views with no conciliation in sight, even though some of the traditional subjects of debate have by now almost been laid to rest. There appears to be virtual agreement on the date of Zoroaster (around 1,000 BCE) and on the fact that the religion of the Achaemenian dynasts is part of the history of Zoroastrianism.[1] Other subjects remain hotly debated (for instance the reconstruction of a pre-Zoroastrian Iranian religion; the status of Zurvanism; the use of the comparative evidence from Vedic literature and from contemporary Iranian religions; the relation between evidence deriving from linguistic and from historical speculations etc.). This has resulted in the situation that, whereas there is no shortage of general introductions to Iranian religions, a comparison between two of these would easily lead the non-specialist reader to the conclusion that a balanced view of Zoroastrianism is impossible. This situation is aggravated by the fact that advocates of different views tend to refer to opposite views as unhistorical or methodologically deficient.[2] The only beneficial aspect of the many debates and mutually exclusive views may be the fact that this situation of Zoroastrian studies suitably illustrates the difficulty of the subject.

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[1] But cf. I. Gershevitch, 'Approaches to Zoroaster's Gathas', *Iran* 33 (1995), 1-29, for a defense of the sixth-century dating of Zarathustra. Although few scholars nowadays would categorically deny that the Achaemenians were Zoroastrians, some have suggested to leave the question open; thus, for instance, H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Political Concepts in Old-Persian Royal Inscriptions', in: K. Raaflaub (ed.), *Anfänge politischen Denkens in der Antike*, München 1993, 145-163, pp. 149-150; C. Herrenschmidt, 'Aspects universalistes de la religion et de l'idéologie de Darius I', in: Gnoli & Lanciotti (eds.), *Orientalia Tucci*, 617-625. There is a *status quaestionis* in C. Herrenschmidt, 'La religion des Achéménides: état de la question', *StIr* 9 (1980), 325-339. For important publications since, cf. J. Kellens, 'Die Religion der Achämeniden', *AoF* 10 (1983), 107-123; *id.*, *Panthéon*, 123-126; Boyce, *HZ* II, *passim*; M. Schwartz, 'The Religion of Achaemenian Iran', *CHI* 2 (1985), 664-697, and the very full *Forschungsbericht* in Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 1-102, discussing historical, cultural, linguistic, textual, archaeological and religious-historical evidence, with innumerable references. These authors all consider the Achaemenian evidence as belonging to the history of Zoroastrianism, as is done in the present book. The question, it seems, is not whether the Achaemenians were Zoroastrians—for this appears to be widely accepted—but what such a proposition implies for the writing of the history of that faith.

In this chapter, a brief overview will be given of the main problem of Zoroastrian history, the (lack of) cohesion between the three main corpora of sources and the additional materials (ch. 2.1). Then the two main approaches to this problem will be outlined (2.2-3) and discussed and a third option will be sketched (2.4). The three approaches will be illustrated with the example of Zurvanism (2.5). Finally, attention will be given to the problem of oral religious traditions (2.6).

The history of Zoroastrianism is a discipline in which textual sources are used much more than material ones. The present study is no exception to this rule. The reasons for this are obvious: the material remains of Iranian religions are on the whole meagre and extremely difficult to interpret. The scarcity of sacred architecture from early periods itself is a clue to one of the characteristics of ancient Iranian religiosity: it was a tradition that did not make use of temples. We know this from the fact that vocabulary for such structures is lacking from the earliest sources and from the fact that Herodotus and other Greek authors specifically state that the Persians did not build temples. This aspect apart, however, there is a general reluctance in the correlation between material and textual sources. Standard histories of Zoroastrianism are therefore mainly based on three distinct corpora of textual sources: the Avesta, the Old Persian inscriptions and Zoroastrian literature in Pahlavi and in New Persian.

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[2] Contrast, for instance, the assessments of each other's work and approach by the leading authority on ancient Iranian linguistics and the leading authority on Iranian religions: J. Kellens in J. Kellens & C. Herrenschmidt, 'La question du rituel dans le mazdéisme ancien et Achéménide', *ASSR* 85 (1994), 45-67, p. 46 (on M. Boyce): "Mais sa connaissance des textes pehlevis ne lui permet pas de travailler les textes avestiques dans ce sens, et son point de vue radicalement anti-historique l'a empêchée de voir les évolutions, voire les ruptures qui ont eu lieu dans la longue existence de cette religion." Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 64 (on, among others, J. Kellens): "All these translations made very important contributions to the understanding of the texts; but for further progress in their interpretation it would seem desirable for such advances to be exploited by the use of what has been called "the more patient and humble historical method", which accords respect to the beliefs and practices of Zoroaster's followers (and hence to his own powers as a teacher of men), and so offers its practitioners some protection from speculative or anachronistic extremes."

These are sources from very different periods and partly from different regions. The Avesta[3] cannot be dated with any precision, but the language of its oldest part is thought to be from around 1,000 BCE and the language of the youngest texts may be from the late Achaemenian or even the Seleucid period. The lack of references to Western Iran in the Avesta has led to the conclusion that the texts derive from an Eastern Iranian region, but there is no possibility of a more exact localisation. The transmission of the Avesta in the form that we still have it, however, is held to be due to a Persian priesthood.[4]

The Old Persian inscriptions,[5] by contrast, are datable with considerable accuracy. The most important texts are from the reigns of Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes II. They are in Old Persian and linguistically therefore belong to Persia proper, South-Western Iran. These texts are not religious documents, but they mention divine beings and occasionally refer to rituals and religious ideas. Much of the discussion on the interpretation of these texts has focused on what they do *not* mention (e.g. the name of Zarathustra or the Heptad), but this is gradually being abandoned, for the obvious reason that such arguments lack substance.[6]

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[3] The standard edition is K.F. Geldner, *Avesta. The Sacred Books of the Parsis*, Stuttgart 1886 (repr. Delhi 1991), although for some texts N.L. Westergaard, *Zendavesta or the Religious Books of the Zoroastrians*, Copenhagen 1852-1854 (repr. Wiesbaden 1994), must still be consulted. There is no satisfactory modern translation, but one can consult F. Wolff, *Avesta. Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen*, Strassburg 1910 (repr. Berlin 1960); J. Darmesteter, *Le Zend-Avesta*, Paris 1892-1893 (repr. 1960); *id.*, *The Zend-Avesta I-II* (SBE 4; 23, Oxford 1882-1887; L.H. Mills' translation of the *Yasna* in the same series, vol. 31, Oxford 1887, is worthless).

[4] For this aspect, cf. K. Hoffmann, 'Das Avesta in der Persis', in: J. Harmatta (ed.), *Prolegomena to the Sources on the History of Pre-Islamic Central Asia*, Budapest 1979, 89-93. There is no consensus on the routes taken by the Avesta before it reached Persis, although several scholars have pointed independently at the region Sīstān-Balūchistān (Arachosia-Drangiana): cf. K. Hoffmann & J. Narten, *Der sasanidische Archetypus. Untersuchungen zu Schreibung und Lautgestalt des Avestischen*, Wiesbaden 1989, 77-85 and Gnoli, *ZTH*, *passim*.

[5] Most OP inscriptions can be conveniently consulted in R.G. Kent, *Old Persian. Grammar–Texts–Lexicon* (AOS 33), New Haven 1953 (1989^2).

[6] Although similar arguments are frequently encountered, the absence of a name or word in an inscription or, in this case, a tiny corpus of inscriptions,

The texts in Middle Persian consist of some inscriptions of considerable importance,[7] but mainly of the many Pahlavi books.[8] These—with few exceptions—form a body of theological literature from Fārs (South-Western Iran); most books are known in redactions from the ninth century CE but they are thought to reflect much older traditions. The antiquity of these traditions cannot be established. The Pahlavi books partly consist of translations of and commentaries on Avestan texts, most of which have been lost in the Avestan original.

The three corpora of sources are not only from different periods and different regions, but also derive from different social backgrounds: the OP inscriptions are royal documents, a substantial part of the Avesta consists of ritual texts memorised by all priests and the Pahlavi books are also priestly documents, but belong to the learned priesthood or the theologians. None of these texts reflect the religion of the laity, even though several aspects of lay religiosity may be gauged from them.

Many of the concepts and ideas of the Younger Avesta derive from the Gāthās. The contents of the Pahlavi books similarly draw their primary inspiration from the Avesta. It is perfectly legitimate, therefore, to trace a development of an idea or a divine being through these sources.[9] Thus, one may reconstruct the development of certain ideas or divine beings. By applying this method on a larger scale, one can contribute to a reconstruction of the development of Zoroastrian doctrine and—to a lesser extent—ritual. This procedure is rejected by none.[10] Similarly, all

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does not at all prove the absence of those names and words in the language concerned. In the Sasanian inscriptions (including those of the Zoroastrian high priest Kirdēr), for instance, one also looks in vain for the names of Zarathustra and the Heptad.

[7] Most of these can be consulted in M. Back, *Die sasanidischen Staatsinschriften* (AI 18), Teheran-Liège 1978; for the inscriptions of Kirdēr, cf. P. Gignoux, *Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdīr* (StIr Cahier 9), Paris 1991; for the inscription of Narseh in Paikuli, cf. H. Humbach & P.O. Skjaervø, *The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli*, Wiesbaden 1978-1983 (four vols.).

[8] For an introduction to this literature, cf. J.C. Tavadia, *Die mittelpersische Sprache und Literatur der Zarathustrier* (Iranische Texte und Hilfsbücher 2), Leipzig 1956.

[9] As is done, for instance, by G. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša in the Zoroastrian Tradition* (ORT 28), Leiden 1985.

[10] It has some limits, however, if one extends the scope of the priestly tradition thus reconstructed into *the* Zoroastrian tradition; this will be discussed in ch. 2.6.

scholars—in spite of some sensationalist claims to the opposite—proceed from a notion of development within the tradition of Zoroastrianism. No scholar has ever defended the view that the Zoroastrian tradition underwent no changes at all from the time of the prophet until the present day.[11] What is at stake in all discussions is not the question whether the Zoroastrian tradition evolved, but the scope and nature of the development and the bare existence of a tradition.

One of the key features of the Zoroastrian problem, therefore, is the relation individual scholars perceive or work with between the three main corpora of textual sources. There also is considerable discussion on the different trends one may perceive within the Avesta and within the Pahlavi books. Similarly, the foreign reports on Iranian religions as well as epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological information need to find a place in general reconstructions of Zoroastrian history. The question that dominates all research is the definition or demarcation of the notion "Zoroastrianism" or "Mazdeism."[12] Most succinctly, one may sum up the "Zoroastrian problem" in the question: do the sources reflect a Zoroastrian tradition or are they the expressions of a number of different religions?

In the academic discussions of this central problem of Zoroastrian studies, I would like to distinguish three different approaches. The first of these—to which I refer as the *fragmentising approach*—rejects the notion of a single Zoroastrian tradition but takes into account several different and mutually exclusive Iranian religions, as reflected in the various sources. The second—to which I refer as the *harmonising approach*—considers all evidence from the background of a single, conservative, Zoroastrian tradition. The third approach—to which I refer as the *diversifying approach*—is a more recent phenomenon that may be described as a protest against the excesses of the earlier two approaches. In contradistinction to the first two approaches, those working from a diversifying perspective do not work with narrow definitions of Zoroastrianism, but with broad and provisional ones. Before we can compare these different approaches, some statements of principle must be made.

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[11] Although Mary Boyce's work is sometimes so caricaturised. Instead of defending her views in this respect, it may be more to the point to refer to the three volumes of her *History of Zoroastrianism*. Anyone who has read these three volumes can no longer maintain that Boyce does not allow of any changes, even dramatical ones.

[12] I do not use the term "Mazdeism" because it is used in two distinct ways in academic writing: for some it represents a notion of a pre- or non-Zoroastrian pan-Iranian Mazdā-worshipping religious tradition (for which there is no evidence); for others it is a synonym of Zoroastrianism chosen, it seems, for euphonic reasons.

The three approaches do not represent different "schools" and do not represent articulated shared views (with the possible exception of the works of the Swedish scholars Nyberg, Wikander and Widengren). Zoroastrian studies are a field of individuals and schools have rarely been formed. None of the three approaches, moreover, is methodologically or historically impossible, given certain parameters all Iranianists work with (the relevance of the ninth-century books for Sasanian Zoroastrianism, for instance). The nature of our sources is such that there is no possibility for the writing of a history of the faith such as it may be possible for Christianity or Islam. We only have snippets of the indigenous Iranian historical traditions and they belong to the area of mythical history.[13] Our texts cannot be dated but rather reflect the timeless quality that Zoroastrianism has cherished throughout its existence. A discussion of the Zoroastrian tradition can therefore not proceed from an historical framework, but has to apply other considerations or tools—ritual or doctrinal developments—and, above all, imagination and speculation.[14]

2. *Fragmentising Views*

The fragmentising approach to the history of Zoroastrianism proceeds from a narrow definition of Zoroastrianism. This definition, reached by an exclusive focus on the Gāthās as only source of information for Zarathustra's teachings,[15] is the main tool of interpretation with which all other textual sources are interpreted. Research is often inspired by linguistic studies of Old Iranian languages and by a strict adherence to the relevance of comparative materials from the Vedic tradition; this evidence is judged to be more significant than the later Zoroastrian interpretations themselves. The sources are taken to reflect different religions, which are often provided with separate histories, theologies and social backgrounds. From this perspective, it is not wholly unexpected that the idea of a "Zoroastrian tradition" is either lost (or neglected) or denied.

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[13] Cf. the introductory essay by E. Yarshater, 'Iranian National History', *CHI* 3, 359-477; Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 129-183.

[14] Cf., for instance, M. Molé, 'Une histoire du mazdéisme est-elle possible? Notes et remarques en marge d'un ouvrage récent', *RHR* 162 (1962), 45-67; 161-218 (the book in question is R.C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, London 1961); S. Shaked, rev. of M. Boyce, *Zoroastranism*, *BSOAS* 58 (1995), 375-379.

[15] Provided the Gāthās are conceived as texts containing teachings. This is actually denied by some scholars working from a fragmentising perspective, for instance J. Kellens, *Zoroastre et l'Avesta ancien*, Louvain-Paris 1991.

Earlier scholars working from this perspective are, for instance, H.S. Nyberg, S. Wikander and G. Widengren.[16] Of the characteristic fragmentising trends in their work, one can think of Nyberg's recognition of a "Mithra-gemeinde" as opposed to a "Gatha-gemeinde," Wikander's reconstruction of a Vāyu-Anāhitā-religion opposed to Zoroastrianism, or Widengren's insistence on the relevance of the linguistic background of certain common MP words (NW-Iranian or SW-Iranian) for the reconstruction of a Median-Parthian religion. They share a strikingly historicising approach to the Gāthās, which they treat as if they contained the biography and all the necessary teachings of Zarathustra.

Similar in this latter aspect is the reconstruction of (the earliest) Zoroastrian history by H. Lommel.[17] Lommel focuses exclusively on the Avesta and is a clear representative of one of the best-known trends of Zoroastrian studies: he reduces the development of Zoroastrianism to a strict Hegelian scheme: *thesis*: pre-Zoroastrian polytheism—*antithesis*: Zarathustra's monotheism—*synthesis*: the return of pagan polytheism in a Zoroastrianised form.[18] This scheme is not exclusive to the fragmentising approach but pervades many other (harmonising) treatments of Zoroastrian history as well.[19]

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[16] Nyberg, *Religionen*; Wikander, *Vāyu I*; *id.*, *Feuerpriester*; Widengren, *Religionen*; *id.* 'Stand und Aufgaben.'

[17] H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras. Nach dem Awesta dargestellt*, Tübingen 1930 (repr. Hildesheim/New York 1971).

[18] This is the situation as represented by Molé, *CMC*, 17: "Trois phases s'y dessinent. Polythéisme du type védique au point de départ; condamnation violente de ce polythéisme par la réforme zoroastrienne; sa restauration partielle par un syncrétisme bâtard triomphant. Thèse, antithèse, synthèse." *CMC* and most other writings of Molé are written in opposition to this idea. Molé's reconstruction may strike one as unfair, because *all* treatments of Zoroastrian history—including his own—are guilty of it. For a recent echo of Molé's reconstruction (with entirely different results), cf. Kellens, *Panthéon*, 11-12.

[19] E.g. Gh. Gnoli, 'Problems and Prospects of the Studies on Persian Reli-

An important fragmentising interpretation for the present book is E. Benveniste's *Persian Religion*. Here we can see a fragmentising approach being elevated almost to the level of a methodology; this is done precisely in the context of the interpretation of the Classical texts. Benveniste's initial suggestions, that the Classical texts should not at all costs be pressed into a single harmonised tradition, are of course valid and important.[20] Much less valid, however, is the direction these suggestions take, for rather than finding in the three authors he discusses (Herodotus, Strabo, Plutarch) three different manifestations of a single tradition, Benveniste recognises three distinct religions in them: pre-Zoroastrian nature-worship (Herodotus), degenerate (*sic*) Cappadocian Mazdeism (Strabo) and Zurvanism (Plutarch). Consequently, none of the three authors reports on Zoroastrianism. Benveniste's interpretations of the different texts will be referred to in the commentaries on the passages (ch. 3), but some general remarks may be made concerning the application of criteria of Zoroastrianism evident from his work. In his conclusion, he states: "Neither Greeks, Syrians nor Armenians knew anything of the Avestic Zoroaster nor of his teachings as expressed in the Gâthâs. This fact must be firmly established."[21] We face here the main idea of advocates of the fragmentising views: Zoroastrianism ought to be defined by the Gāthās and by the Gāthās alone; anything that is not Gathic, is not Zoroastrian, but derives from the common stock of Iranian religiosity.

Yet this can hardly be relevant; it clashes, in fact, with the conception Zoroastrians had of their own faith. In the Sasanian period, some priests held that the revelation of Ohrmazd to Zarathustra was restricted to the Gāthās.[22] This, to be sure, is treated

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gion', in: U. Bianchi, C.J. Bleeker & A. Bausani (eds.), *Problems and Methods of the History of Religions* (SHR-*NUMEN* Suppl. 19), Leiden 1972, 67-101 (with discussion); *id.*, *ZTH*, *passim*. Notions of degenerating Iranian religiosity are commonly found; a recent example of such reconstructions is B. Hjerrild, 'The Survival and Modification of Zoroastrianism in Seleucid Times', in: P. Bilde *et alii* (eds.), *Religion and Religious Practice in the Seleucid Kingdom* (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization 1), Århus 1990, 140-150, whose conclusions (p. 149) are that "the universal proselytizing religion with grand visions of the battle between good and evil and the ultimate victory of the Good, had been metamorphosed into a rigorous doctrine most concerned with discipline and theological speculations."

[20] Cf. the emotional response to them by Molé, *CMC*, 8-9.

[21] *Persian Religion*, 119.

[22] Dk. 3.7 (DkM. 9f). I have had the benefit of a new interpretation of the text by S. Shaked, 'Zoroastrians and Others in Sasanian Iran', Paper read at the

as a heresy: in response to this view it is firmly stated that the entire Avesta is the revealed word of Ahura Mazdā to Zarathustra. Parts of the Avesta are written in question-answer style, as if they record a discussion between Ahura Mazdā and Zarathustra. Zoroastrianism even at the time of Herodotus must therefore by necessity not be treated as a system of ideas that transpires from the Gāthās, but as a religion that is reflected in the entire Avesta, because the entire Avesta is held to reflect the revelation.

What is really at stake here, however, is the originality of Zarathustra's teaching. This is the subject of one of the most important modern representatives of a fragmentising approach, J. Kellens.[23] We shall take as an indication of his ideas a short article concerned with methodology and general considerations on Iranian religious history.[24] In it, Kellens formulates three criteria which he considers indispensable for the existence of Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism only exists if there is a religious tradition which 1) was so radically innovative that it would have come into conflict with the preexisting religion; 2) was a personal creation, constituted and preached by a powerful historical person; 3) was propagated by a deliberate and persevering missionary activity.[25] Since we do not understand the Gāthās even remotely, we can formulate no answers to these questions and therefore the conclusion seems inescapable: we must rid ourselves of the notion of Zarathustra as a prophet.[26]

If one surveys the history of religions, it seems that the only religion that comes close to meeting such conditions is Islam. There are sufficient grounds, therefore, to question the conditions themselves. If one looks at them from the point of view of the later history of Zoroastrianism, moreover, it would seem that Zarathustra also came very close. For the first condition, Zarathustra's originality, one can think of Ahura Mazdā[27] and of the

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Conference "Late Antiquity and Early Islam", London 1993, which Prof. Shaked kindly placed at my disposal.

[23] For example *Zoroastre et l'Avesta ancien*; *Le panthéon de l'Avesta ancien*.

[24] J. Kellens, 'Questions préalables', in Kellens (ed.), *Religion iranienne*, 81-86.

[25] Kellens, 'Questions préalables', 84.

[26] The real conclusion would of course be that Zoroastrianism did not exist, but Kellens leaves this point open. It may be useful to recall here, that Kellens is not concerned with later periods of the faith, but only with considerations of its early history.

[27] The status of Ahura Mazdā is debatable; whereas some scholars uphold the notion of a pre-Zoroastrian existence of this divinity (e.g. Boyce, *HZ* I, 22-

repudiation of the *daēvas*.[28] Conflicts with an earlier religion are attested by the *Fravarānē* (Y. 12), the *Missionsbekenntnis* of early Zoroastrianism,[29] which requires converts to publicly declare that they will no longer destroy Zoroastrian houses. For the second condition, we have the important evidence from the Younger Avesta, which not only unequivocally presents Zarathustra as a powerful historical person, but also refers to its own early history as being based on "the listening to the teaching."[30] With regard to the third condition, there is not only the evidence from Y. 42.6, which Kellens rejects, but also the evidence from Yt. 13.97 on the famous Saēna son of Ahūm.stūt, who was the first to have a hundred pupils,[31] as well as the existence to the present day of Zoroastrianism itself.

The most obvious problem is, of course, the fact that Zoroastrianism as reflected in the Younger Avesta consistently presents itself as the religion that took shape through the revelation of Ahura Mazdā's words to Zaṛathustra and through Zarathustra's activities as a teacher. Virtually no one would treat these texts as

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84; F.B.J. Kuiper, 'Ahura Mazdā, 'Lord Wisdom'?', *IIJ* 18 (1976), 25-42), others consider Ahura Mazdā to be the personal god of Zarathustra: cf. Lommel, *Religion*, 16-17; Gnoli, *ZTH*, 199-204, and particularly S. Shaked, 'First Man, First King. Notes on Semitic-Iranian Syncretism and Iranian Mythological Transformations', in: S. Shaked, D. Shulman & G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Gilgul. Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions* (SHR-*NUMEN* Suppl. 50), Leiden 1987, 238-256, pp. 238-239. Kellens himself has recently argued that the special position of Ahura Mazdā is the most distinctive characteristic of Zoroastrianism (*Panthéon*, 117-122).

[28] Kellens does not take into account this argument, because in his view (*Panthéon*, 11-34; 'Questions préalables', 84) there is no evidence for Iranian *daēva*-worship, and therefore the repudiation of the *daēvas* must have been common to all Iranian religious traditions. The question of Iranian *daēva*-worship is still open, however; there is good evidence from Soghdian onomastics (cf. particularly W.B. Henning, 'A Sogdian God', *BSOAS* 28 (1965), 242-254 (= *Selected Papers* II, 617-629)). It is, moreover, important to realise one thing: there is a difference between not worshipping (i.e. not knowing) the *daēvas* and denying the *daēvas* worship. In other words, even though no Iranians may have existed who worshipped the *daēvas* (which is questionable to begin with), there is only one tradition we know of that *specifically* recognises these beings by proscribing their worship. Such a state of affairs is not only unparalleled in the Vedas but also in the traces of non-Zoroastrian Iranian religions that survive in the Ossetic religion and the religious traditions of the Yezidis.

[29] Nyberg, *Religionen*, 274.

[30] The most important evidence here comes from Yt. 13.149 and Y. 26.4, in the characterisation of the earliest teachers of the faith, who are referred to as *paoiriia- sāsnō.gūš-*, "who were the first to hear the teachings" (Kellens, *Noms-racines*, 33).

[31] Cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 29.

historical documents in the sense Kellens requires for the recognition of Zoroastrianism to be possible. They are obviously historical records in the sense that they are part of the history Zoroastrianism created for itself. Since the same Zoroastrians who transmitted this view of their history are also responsible for the transmission of the Gāthās, such a representation of Zoroastrian history can hardly be brushed aside as irrelevant.

We have perhaps dwelt too long on these problems of the earliest history of Zoroastrianism. This aspect of the history of Zoroastrianism, however, is possibly the most revealing of the differences between the fragmentising and the harmonising approaches. The bone of contention in this discussion is the question whether the later tradition may be used in the interpretation of the Gāthās or not. Kellens applies a methodological rigour in rejecting the application of the later tradition. This suits his interests best, for he is more than anything else concerned with the interpretation of the Gāthās. He therefore admits as a rule only the internal evidence from the Old Avestan texts and the evidence deriving from a comparison with the Vedas. This latter aspect is linguistically entirely acceptable—it is indeed the basis of the study of the Old Avestan texts—but historically at least as problematic as relying on the later Zoroastrian tradition. One could try to accept the linguistic closeness between the two languages without relying too heavily on the much wider attested and better known Vedic language as the *only* tool to interpret the Old Avestan texts. Boyce, the main modern representative of the harmonising approach, has throughout her work consistently defended the use of the later tradition in the interpretation of the Gāthās. Her interest lies primarily in the development of the Zoroastrian tradition, which unquestionably grew out of the Gāthās. The two approaches—at least in the work of Kellens and Boyce—do not only reflect different methodologies, but also different interests.

3. *Harmonising Views*

The harmonising approach to the history of Zoroastrianism also proceeds from a narrow definition of Zoroastrianism, based on the combined evidence of the Avesta and the Pahlavi books. Its main attitude towards the three textual corpora is the recognition of the fact that the three different collections of texts basically reflect the same tradition, a tradition that deserves to be called Zoroastrianism (because it grew out of the teaching of Zarathustra). The numerous developments are due not to ruptures or dramatic breaks in the tradition (as in fragmentising views) and certainly do not reflect different religions, but are interpreted as manifestations of an organic process of growth comparable to, for instance, pre-Reformation Christianity. Research is often inspired by a great reliance on the importance of the contents of the Pahlavi books as the final repository of the entire development of the tradition.

Harmonising views are also found in different manifestations. A transitional case between harmonising and fragmentising views is the influential article by I. Gershevitch, who proposed to distinguish between Zarathuštrianism (the religious doctrine of Zarathustra), Zarathuštricism (the religion of the Younger Avesta) and Zoroastrianism (the Iranian religion under the Sasanians).[32] Gershevitch appears to combine a fragmentising with a harmonising approach, in presenting a tradition existing in a plurality of systems, that have emerged in different historical periods. Gershevitch's distinctions do not reflect different religions, for they are not mutually exclusive, but different stages of development of a single tradition, exemplified by the nature of dualistic views. In itself, this is an entirely valid approach, but I would hesitate to draw the distinctions as sharply as Gershevitch does. He does, moreover, attempt to put a date and a place to all the developments by upholding the sixth-century date of Zarathustra.[33]

A wholly different example of the harmonising approach is the highly original work of Marijan Molé, which is the only structuralist attempt at interpreting the Zoroastrian texts.[34] Molé was one of the first scholars to fully reject the common paradigm of the development of Zoroastrianism as a process involving pre-Zoroastrian polytheism, Zarathuštrian monotheism and the return of polytheism with a Zoroastrian flavour. Instead, he viewed the entire tradition from two strictly observed principles: the tripartite ideology of G. Dumézil and the conviction that ritual was the key to the three corpora of sources, which should be interpreted in a structuralist manner.[35] His main thesis is that Zoroastrianism manifests itself according to three different principles of involvement or three different degrees of initiation. He distinguishes between the three categories of religious knowledge (from the division of the Greater Avesta) that can be detected in the Pahlavi books (*dādīg*, *hadāmānsrīg* and *gāhānīg*—legal, ritual and Gathic) and divided them in a social-legal manifestation, a ritual-technical manifestation and a theological manifestation. The three social functions have been both internalised and brought onto an ethical level and find their manifestation in these three types of Zoroastrian religiosity, ranging from the most esoteric (Gathic) orientation to the most exoteric (legal) manifestation.[36] Molé himself uses as an example the religion as described by Herodotus (*Historiae* 1.131-132; 140, for which cf. ch. 3.1). Certain elements in this description do not fit well together. Molé distinguishes between the practices of the Magi (singing the theogony after the sacrifice; observing the rites of exposure and the killing of evil creatures) and the practices of the Persians (worshipping Zeus, the elements and luminaries; sacrificing an animal on a hilltop, refraining from urinating and bathing in a river etc.) and concludes that the religiosity of the Magi reflects the *gāhānīg* orientation, and the religiosity of the Persians the *dādīg* orientation, which is comparable with the Achaemenian inscriptions. All manifestations, however, basically belong to Zoroastrianism; the Magi are the guardians of an esoteric tradition based on the Gathas and the Persians observe the legal orientation evident, for instance, from the equation in Pahlavi literature between "worshipping the elements" and "taking care not to defile them."[37] Molé thus denies the possibility of an historical approach to Zoroastrianism.

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[32] I. Gershevitch, 'Zoroaster's Own Contribution', *JNES* 23 (1964), 12-38.

[33] Cf. especially 'Approaches to Zoroaster's Gathas', *Iran* 33 (1995), 1-29.

[34] Especially his magisterial *CMC*; cf. also 'Le problème des sectes zoroastriennes dans les livres pehlevis', *Oriens* 13-14 (1960-1961), 1-28; 'Une histoire du mazdéisme'.

The radically opposite view is taken by Gherardo Gnoli, who has consistently defended that an historical approach is the only possible method to place the development of Zoroastrianism in perspective.[38] Since the Iranian sources do not present us with many historical data, Gnoli's first effort was to interpret the geographical evidence from the Avesta.[39] His conclusions, which go largely uncontested, have placed a great weight on the localisation of Zarathustra and the "Avestan people" in the Eastern Iranian cultural world, more particularly in Sīstān and the adjacent regions of the Hindūkuš and Bactria. Having established this localisation, Gnoli puts Zarathustra's date at the end of the second millennium BCE. He also attempts to situate Zarathustra in an historical milieu, presenting him as an anti-ritualistic prophet engaged in mortal enmity with raving bands of warrior youths (the *Männerbünde*) who worshipped the *daēva*'s.[40] Gnoli's interests reflect a strong awareness of the importance of sociological interpretations of early Zoroastrian history. Zarathustra was opposed to the Haoma-cult and to animal sacrifice (because these were characteristic elements of the adherents of the cults he opposed), and replaced this traditional religiosity with an ethical spirituality which was monotheistic and dualistic. Zarathustra's dualism was characterised by the opposition between *aṣ̌a-* and *drug-*, "truth" and "the lie" and similar opposites, not by the opposition between Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu. In Gnoli's view, this dualism arose later under theological speculations probably deriving from the Magi.[41] Gnoli essentially presents the development of Zoroastrianism in the familiar terms criticised by Molé: pre-Zoroastrian polytheism, Zarathuštrian monotheism (and antiritualism), Zoroastrian syncretism (exemplified by the innovation in the dualistic formula and the reintroduction of all that was abolished by Zarathustra: polytheism and a sacrificial tradition). He is one of the firm defenders of the view that Ahura Mazdā is the god of Zarathustra and did not exist prior to the Zoroastrian reform. He also elaborately defends an historicising reading of the Gāthās; in fact, much of his historical approach to Zoroastrian history rests upon such an interpretation. At various places he has criticised those who stress a continuity from proto-Iranian religiosity to Zoroastrianism, thus denying Zarathustra any originality.[42] For Gnoli, Zarathustra is an historical personality who has had an enormous impact on the development of

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[35] *CMC*, 1-25.

[36] *CMC*, 60-74.

[37] For this equation, cf. ch. 4.1.6.

[38] Cf. particularly *ZTH* and *The Idea of Iran*, where copious bibliographies are given, a.o. of Gnoli's prolific scholarly output. For a brief overview of Gnoli's ideas, cf. *id.*, *De Zoroastre à Mani. Quatre leçons au Collège de France*, Paris 1985.

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[39] Cf. particularly Gh. Gnoli, *Ricerche storiche sul Sīstān antico*, Roma 1967; *ZTH*, 23-158; *Idea of Iran*, 29-70.

[40] E.g. *ZTH*, 181-188.

[41] *ZTH*, 206-207.

[42] E.g. *ZTH*, 192, n. 53.

Iranian religions, by the formulation of monotheism, the worship of Ahura Mazdā and the rejection of the *daēvas* as worthy of worship. Taking these elements as representative for Zarathuštrian religion, he cannot but conclude that any Mazdā-worship is Zoroastrian, and that, even if it were only for that reason, the religion of the Achaemenians must be Zoroastrianism. In fact, since the Achaemenians do not only worship Ahuramazdā, but also reject the *daēvas* and express their religious feelings in terms of the opposition between *arta* and *drauga*, the religion of the Achaemenians by necessity was a form of Zoroastrianism.[43]

The best-known representative of a harmonising approach is Mary Boyce.[44] The idea of the unity, cohesion and conservatism of the Zoroastrian tradition is a dominant force in her work. Quite apart from how one judges the results of her research, it must be acknowledged that the writing of a history of Zoroastrianism on a scale such as the three volumes of her *History* present, *can* only be achieved if research is guided by a powerful *idée directrice*. Boyce's work is controversial because of this guiding idea, which is, however, frequently caricaturised as being "unhistorical," just as her scholarship is sometimes unjustly caricaturised as being based on a defective knowledge of the relevant languages.[45]

In the introduction to the first volume of *HZ*, Boyce has stated one of the fundamental principles of her approach to the Zoroastrian tradition: "In undertaking it the writer started from the premise that Zoroaster's message is more likely to have been understood by his own disciples and followers than by students from a totally different culture and religious heritage, who first came to struggle with it, purely intellectually, millennia after he had preached. Accordingly throughout this work considerable reliance has been placed on the Zoroastrian tradition, which can be shown to have been remarkably consistent at all known periods down to the time of European impact in the mid-19th century."[46] No scholar would deny the first part of this premise.

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[43] E.g. *Idea of Iran*, 85.

[44] Cf. especially the three volumes of her *History of Zoroastrianism*; for a shorter introduction, cf. *Zoroastrians*; for an overview of her reconstructions in contrast with challenges posed by other scholars, cf. *Zoroastrianism*.

[45] By far the worst example, in this respect, is J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'Johanna Narten, Mary Boyce, Georges Dumézil', *PFECIS*, 85-94.

[46] *HZ* I, xi.

Whether it follows, however, that therefore the *entire* Zoroastrian tradition may be used in the interpretation even of the earliest texts is a claim of an entirely different magnitude. In that way, development would seem to be excluded.

But it is important to note that this is not at all what Boyce does in her reconstructions of Zoroastrian history. Such evident areas as the development of the temple-cult of fire, the worship of statues, the cult of Anāhitā and other *yazatas*, the development of Zurvanite speculations etc. are fully incorporated and treated as historical processes of innovation. These are not traced back to Zarathustra at all, but distinct places and periods of origin are attributed to them. Boyce's main claim, however, is that such developments should not be interpreted as ruptures or as manifestations of other religions, but that they are due to evolutionary, one might say organic, processes.

As is well known, Boyce did research in Zoroastrian villages in the vicinity of Yazd in Iran. This research culminated in a magnificent description of traditional Zoroastrian life, which has since almost vanished.[47] The religious life of these Persian Zoroastrians reflected to a considerable extent the Zoroastrianism we encounter in the Pahlavi books. Many of the changes that were apparent could be explained by taking into account the effects of more than a millennium of Islamic rule and cultural influence. Similarly, the Zoroastrian literature grew out of the Avesta and the Avesta has its origins in the teachings of Zarathustra as we can find them in the Gāthās. Boyce's enterprise, basically, is finding an answer to the evident question how it is possible to connect the living Zoroastrianism she encountered in the Yazdi plains with the message of Zarathustra. At the moment when she started writing, there was a widespread scepticism with regard to the connection between Zarathustra and modern Zoroastrianism.

In opposition to this scepticism, Boyce posited the basic unity of the Zoroastrian tradition by focusing on some of the cardinal aspects of this tradition: the ritual, the cosmogony and the relation between these two aspects. This led her to draw a picture of Zarathustra as an historical person who combined the capacities of a fully trained priest and a visionary prophet, conservative and innovative at the same time.[48] The conservative aspect of the religion he inspired can be found in his maintaining the traditional ritual, the innovative aspect in his profound transformation of the meaning of this ritual. In order to explain this transformation, Boyce attached great importance to the doctrine of the Amesha Spentas, the divine Heptad, representing in an inextricable manner the seven elements of creation, the seven divinities guarding these elements and the seven cardinal virtues. Further profoundly new elements in Zoroaster's thought were the preeminence of Ahura Mazdā—whom Boyce considers to have an Indo-Iranian background—the stress upon the fact that Ahura Mazdā created the entire world, and the recognition of an independent power of evil, who was to become Angra Mainyu, the Evil Spirit.[49] The recognition of this individual principle of evil, his activities in creation and especially in man, led the prophet to a powerful and strikingly new vision of the events that were yet to happen: he envisaged an end to time and a final judgment supplementing rather than supplanting the individual judgment the soul of a person undergoes after death. Zarathustra's main innovation was the transformation of his native religion to a religion that was both ritualistic (which was part of his heritage) and ethical (which was a new dimension).

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[47] Boyce, *Stronghold*, *passim*.

[48] M. Boyce, 'Zoroaster the Priest', *BSOAS* 33 (1970), 22-38.

It cannot escape anyone that this outline of Zoroastrian doctrine greatly resembles the Zoroastrianism familiar from the Pahlavi books. In the process of putting all data from Iranian religious history in perspective, Boyce has consistently stressed the "conservatism" of the Zoroastrian "orthodoxy" and thus drawn the picture of a linear development of the Zoroastrian tradition—which she fully acknowledges and defends—from the times of the prophet to the pre-modern period (and beyond). But "conservatism" and "orthodoxy" are relative concepts (they only exist in relation to the notions "innovation" and "heterodoxy" respectively) and not independent qualities. It is here that the problems begin.

Boyce's reconstruction of the development of Zoroastrianism works very well when it is confined to the Avesta and the Pahlavi books. This, it will be argued below, is due to the particular nature of these works. Boyce's reconstruction becomes slightly less convincing when the data from the Achaemenian period are incorporated.[50] When it comes to the Seleucid and Parthian periods, and particularly to the Classical sources—which are almost our only source for this period—however, some weaknesses become apparent that are closely tied up with her insistence on the permanence of "orthodoxy." Everything that clashes with this reconstructed orthodoxy, it seems, needs to be explained away.

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[49] E.g. *Zoroastrians*, 17-29.

One area where this becomes apparent in Boyce's work is the position of the Amesha Spentas in Western Zoroastrianism. There is only one Greek text referring to the Amesha Spentas as a group (Plutarch, cf. ch. 3.3) and only one Armenian text referring to the Heptad. Given the importance Boyce has, rightly, attached to the Amesha Spentas for Zoroastrian theology, this situation is evidently in need of an explanation. One such explanation could be, that the doctrine of the Amesha Spentas was not very important for the religious life of the Zoroastrians, but typical for priestly traditions. This fits in well with the fact that Plutarch in several respects appears to reproduce priestly traditions. It could also explain why in Armenia Spenta Ārmaiti was transformed into a male underworld deity. The Amesha Spentas are relatively unimportant in the ritual life of lay Zoroastrians: that, at least, is suggested by the daily prayers and litanies. The *Niyāyišn*-texts are a case in point: they are five prayers regularly recited, dedicated to the Sun, Mithra, the Moon, the Waters and Fire. In those areas where the priests excelled, such as cosmological and cosmogonical speculations, the Amesha Spentas are of course of great importance.

Since in Boyce's reconstruction, the doctrine of the Amesha Spentas is the backbone of the Zoroastrian religion, she has to assume that this doctrine was too difficult to understand for non-Zoroastrians. The fact that the Amesha Spentas are absent from almost *all* foreign reports on Zoroastrianism, in other words, is due to a lack of interest or clear-sightedness in all Greek, Roman, Syrian and Armenian authors.[51] At the same time, she has suggested that Herodotus' description of the Persian pantheon represents the doctrine of the Amesha Spentas immanent in "their" creations, which is certainly wrong, and she interprets a reference to Hera as patronage of marriage as an *interpretatio graeca* of Spenta Ārmaiti, which is equally problematic.[52] Such a presentation of affairs is just possible. It does not, however, emerge naturally from the sources.[53] We know that the doctrine of the Heptad exists in parts of the Avesta, as it exists in the Pahlavi books. What we cannot know, however, is the importance of this doctrine in other domains than speculations on cosmogony and cosmology.

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[50] For example her tenuous suggestions that the six conspirators and Darius are the visual representatives of Ahura Mazdā and the Amesha Spentas and that Darius thus "exploited an accident of history for the purposes of religious and political propaganda" (*HZ* II, 91-94).

[51] Thus, e.g., *HZ* III, 380.

Ultimately, the interpretation of foreign reports on Iranian religions is a question of how much credit one is prepared to give to the individual authors. If they are given much credit, the information they provide will inevitably change perceptions of Iranian religious history based on the Avesta and the Pahlavi books. If a strong version of a reconstructed orthodox tradition is used as an interpretative framework, the interpretation of foreign reports on that religion will inevitably show them to represent by and large this reconstructed orthodox tradition.[54] It is perhaps time to question the viability of this procedure in the case of Zoroastrianism and to restore to the foreign observers the importance which many of them seem to deserve.

4. *Diversifying views*

What the study of Zoroastrian history lacks most, it seems, is balance. The least one can say about most treatments of the history of Zoroastrianism, or parts of it, is that there has been an excessive focus on one aspect of the tradition: the priestly teachings.[55] This is entirely understandable and may even be defended on the basis of the fact that apart from some peripheral sources, we have nothing but the priestly documents. Nevertheless, the common procedure by which the combined evidence from the Avesta and the Pahlavi books is first presented as *the* Zoroastrian tradition and then presumed to have been valid for *all* Zoroastrians, has resulted in an image of Zoroastrianism that is static and unconvincing.

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[52] *HZ* II, 179 (Herodotus); 220 (Hera).

[53] For other examples cf. with regard to Mithra for instance the review of *HZ* III by P.G. Kreyenbroek, *BSOAS* 57 (1994), 388-391; with regard to Zurvanism, ch. 2.5.

[54] As is illustrated, for instance, in Russell, *ZorArm*, *passim*. For an alternative way of looking at Armenian religious traditions, cf. J.-P. Mahé, 'Le soleil et la lune dans la mythologie Arménienne', in: C. Paris (ed.), *Caucasologie et mythologie comparée*, Paris 1992, 149-175. Similar contrasts can be observed in the reconstructions of the pre-Christian Georgian religion by O.G. von Wesendonk, 'Über georgisches Heidentum', *Caucasica* 1 (1924), 1-110 (strong Zoroastrian influence) and M. van Esbroeck, 'La religion géorgienne pré-chrétienne', *ANRW* II.18.4 (1990), 2694-2725 (hardly any Zoroastrian influence).

[55] It is certainly not a unique field of research in this respect. In recent years, there have been some good new treatments of religious traditions that have shown how a scholarly focus on *one* aspect of religious traditions can obscure

Zarathustra's existence cannot be proved and cannot be disproved. It is, moreover, for the greater part of our discipline, irrelevant. Zarathustra exists within the Zoroastrian tradition, which claims to have grown out of his teaching and which has faithfully preserved some of his words, the Gāthās. There is no other option but to view Zarathustra from within the tradition, because only the tradition has preserved his memory and his texts. Treating the Gāthās as if they are wholly unrelated to the tradition is at least as anachronistic as interpreting the Gāthās on the basis of that tradition alone. The process of interpreting the Gāthās is frequently presented as an either/or-situation: either one relies upon the Vedic comparison only, or one relies wholly on the Zoroastrian tradition.[56] It is impossible to choose any of these, however, for in their extreme forms, both ways of interpreting the Gathas rest on shaky postulates. The postulate of the Vedic comparison may work well for problems of comparative linguistics, but should not be used as the exclusive tool of research for the establishment of the *meaning* of religious documents. It is difficult, if not impossible, to connect linguistic evidence with the study of religion;[57] etymologies can contribute

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and impede further research. The study of Tibetan Buddhism, for instance, has suffered from a heavy focus on the centralised monastic, clerical traditions centered around the Gelugpa order: G. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans. Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, Washington 1993. The study of Inner Asian religions has demonstrably suffered from a solitary focus on one aspect of these religions, viz. shamanism: D. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde. Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, University Park, Pennsylvania 1994, 27-50. The study of Yezidism has been confined largely to the question of the origins of this religion, rather than descriptions and interpretations of its contents and rituals: Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 1-25.

[56] Cf. the characterisation of these approaches by Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 27, n. 1: "It is advisable to strike a balance between two extreme positions: between, on the one hand, regarding the Gathas as provincial Vedic texts, and, on the other, reading the whole of later Zoroastrianism into them."

[57] The procedures still current in Iranian studies have come under massive attack in the area of Biblical exegesis; cf. particularly J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford 1961, esp. pp. 107-160 and pp. 206-262.

little to the understanding of a concept, if only for the fact that the meaning of the word may have changed before it came to be used in the context we know it from.[58] The point here is that both the later Zoroastrian tradition *and* the Veda are, in a sense, remote from the Gāthās. Whereas the later Zoroastrian tradition demonstrably grew out of the Gāthās, however, the Veda equally demonstrably is wholly unrelated to them. Interpreting the Gāthās on the basis of the Veda is based on the conviction that the Vedic texts are—linguistically as well as culturally and conceptually—closer to the Gāthās than the later Zoroastrian tradition. This can only be verified as far as grammar is concerned, but not for the specific domains of cultural or religious history. The critique is sometimes voiced that a reliance on the Zoroastrian tradition to interpret the Gāthās is a procedure through which one encounters familiar words and concepts from the later traditions and reads them into the Gāthās.[59] This is equally true of a strict and exclusive reliance on the Vedas. Any methodological argument proscribing the use of the Younger Avesta because of its great temporal distance from the Old Avesta, while at the same time promoting the use of the Veda in spite of its considerable geographical (and possibly temporal, cultural and religious) distance, merely replaces one dubious approach by another but does not enhance or diminish the scientific character of the work itself.[60]

On the other hand, the trend of tracing back in the Gāthās all elements of Zoroastrian doctrine is equally problematic. Many elements of Zoroastrian doctrine can be traced back *to* the Gāthās: they grew out of certain Gathic speculations.[61] But the

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[58] There are some very good examples from Avestan; cf. particularly the discussion of the word *saošiiaṇt-* in Hintze, *Zamyād-yašt*, 151-157.

[59] Kellens, 'Questions préalables', 85.

[60] There are likewise no grounds for attaching greater importance to the Vedas than to the Avesta for the interpretation of the OP inscriptions, as was suggested recently by C. Herrenschmidt in *ead*. & J. Kellens, 'La question du rituel dans le mazdéisme ancien et achéménide', *ASSR* 85 (1994), 45-67, pp. 56-64. As illustrated by the work of this same scholar, the evidence of the OP inscriptions can be fruitfully analysed by making internal comparisons ('Aspects universalistes de la religion et de l'idéologie de Darius I', in: Gnoli & Lanciotti (eds.), *Orientalia Tucci*, 617-625). Reliance on the Avesta as the main tool of interpretation has often led to distortions (as argued by Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Political Concepts in Old-Persian Royal Inscriptions', 149-150; Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 95-100), but reliance on Vedic etymologies leads to equally predictable groundless speculations, as illustrated by the abovementioned article.

[61] This has been shown convincingly by Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, *passim*.

Gāthās cannot be expected to reflect all elements of the later Zoroastrian doctrine. A clear area where this is problematic is the idea of a bodily resurrection. The resurrection is nowhere referred to in the Gāthās. At the same time, it is a fundamental notion in the later Zoroastrian tradition and can be found referred or alluded to in Yt. 19 and in Vd. 18.51; it is of course a pivotal theme in Pahlavi literature.[62] With regard to the antiquity of the idea, the sources fail us to the extent that we cannot affirm or deny the presence of the theme of the resurrection in Zarathustra's thinking. One should not forget that the fact that the Gāthās do not refer to the resurrection can never be invoked to prove that the resurrection was not a theme in Zarathustra's thought.[63] On the other hand, if such a theme does not occur in the Gāthās, one should not necessarily assume that it did in other expressions of the prophet's teachings, *because* it occurs in the later Zoroastrian tradition. In those cases, as so often in the study of Zoroastrian history, a *non liquet* is as far as we can get.

We are faced with two excessive manifestations of the study of Zoroastrian history: the outright denial of a continuous tradition, which is incapable of proof, and the insistence on an unchanging kernel of Zoroastrian doctrine, profoundly original and deriving from the inspired visions of the prophet himself, which is equally incapable of demonstration. An additional negative effect of both approaches, is the fact that all manifestations of Iranian religiosity that do not conform fully to a postulate of "original" Zoroastrianism, are tucked away in obscure or invented alternative religions or heresies.

There is, however, a third approach which attempts to avoid the excessive criticism or the excessive lack of it evident from the strongest forms of the fragmentising and the harmonising views. What distinguishes this approach most from the other two, is the fact that it is based not in a narrow definition of "Zoroastrianism;" but insists on using broad and preliminary definitions.[64]

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[62] For which, cf. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 27-51; de Jong, 'Shadow and Resurrection.'

[63] M. Boyce's assessment that "Belief in the "future body" (Pahl. *tan ī pasēn*), repeatedly affirmed in later Zoroastrian works, appears as an integral part of Zoroaster's eschatological teachings [...], but is one of his doctrines not alluded to in the *Gathas*." (*Zoroastrianism*, 81, n. 70) is therefore well within the limits of possibility, but only if one attaches little weight to her use of the word "his."

[64] Representatives of these views are S. Shaked (*Dualism in Transformation*; 'The Myth of Zurvan' etc.) and P.G. Kreyenbroek ('Cosmogony and Cosmology'; 'On the Shaping of Zoroastrian Theology' etc.).

This insistence is based on the fact that contrary to what is often suggested, the evidence we have shows a variegated, elastic tradition rather than a strict doctrinal system. This may be illustrated with various examples:

1) We know that the Zoroastrian pantheon is not at all completely reflected in the Zoroastrian sources; there were more gods than we know from these texts. The Elamite tablets record the worship of Miždusi and Bṛtakāmya, from the Sasanian period there is the clear evidence of the god Sāsān, from Bactria the divine being μοζδοοανο, and from Central Asia the flourishing cult of the Oxus.[65] As we have seen, the worship of the Amesha Spentas appears to have failed to attract a great popularity in parts of Western Iran. Only occasionally do we find a reference to an individual member of the Heptad (Vohu Manah in Strabo; Spenta Ārmaiti in Armenian); the Heptad itself is only mentioned once in Greek and once in Armenian literature. Similar contrasts may be seen between the significant silence of the Pahlavi books on Anāhitā and the overwhelming attestation of her popularity in Greek and Armenian literature. It is of course hazardous to draw firm conclusions from these observations, but they are strongly suggestive of a type of Zoroastrianism typical of the most Western parts of the Iranian cultural area, where the Amesha Spentas never gained much prominence in spite of their evident doctrinal importance. Similarly, the enormous popularity of Anāhitā in Western Iran may be assured, but can be shown to have produced little doctrinal reflection in priestly circles. The pantheon thus appears to have varied locally and in different periods.

2) We are very ill-informed on magical and alternative religious practices in Zoroastrian Iran. The recent publication of several magical seals, however, has drawn attention to the existence of magical traditions in Sasanian Iran. Several of the published seals belonged to members of the clergy.[66] The magical bowls from Sasanian Mesopotamia have revealed several divine and demoniac beings with Iranian names that are otherwise un-

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[65] For Miždusi and Brtakāmya, cf. H. Koch, 'Religion und Kulten' in: Kellens (ed.), *Religion iranienne*, 94-95; for Sāsān, cf. R. Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques en Iran Sassanide* (StIr Cahier 17), Paris 1995, 55-57; for the Bactrian religion, cf. *HZ* III, 156-165.

[66] Gyselen, *Sceaux magiques*. Cf. also the recently published ostracon from Turkmenistan mentioning a horoscope and a fortune-teller: A.B. Nikitin, 'Middle Persian Ostraka from South Turkmenistan', *EW* 42 (1992), 103-130, no. 6.

known or perform functions not attributed to them in normative Zoroastrianism.[67] The Zoroastrian women of Yazd, observed by Boyce, performed the sacrifice of a black hen dedicated to "the man under the earth" (*ādam-e šīw zwīn*) during which the recitation of Avestan was forbidden and the name of God might not be invoked.[68]

3) Most significantly, there is a great variety of cosmogonical and eschatological myths that coexisted with what is now perceived as "the" Zoroastrian cosmogony and eschatology. What characterises most varieties of Zoroastrianism, is an insistence on the fact that Ahura Mazdā is the (only) creator god.[69] This insistence on the creative act of Ahura Mazdā and of Ahura Mazdā alone is in marked contrast with the references to the cosmogony in Vedic literature.[70] It is most likely that this innovation should be attributed to Zarathustra. That Ahura Mazdā is the creator of everything is one of the pillars of ancient Zoroastrianism. Any form of Zoroastrianism would be difficult to imagine that did not recognise Ahura Mazdā as the creator. This aspect apart, however, there are many different traditions concerning the practicalities of the cosmogony. Some of these are preserved in Pahlavi literature (for instance the idea that the cosmos was created in the shape of a body of a man, *PhlRDd* 46). Others are preserved, in various permutations, in foreign reports.[71]

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[67] S. Shaked, 'Bagdāna, King of the Demons, and other Iranian Terms in Babylonian Aramaic Magic', in: *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, vol. 2 (AI 25), Leiden 1985, 511-525.

[68] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 62-63.

[69] J. Kellens, 'Ahura Mazdā n'est pas un dieu créateur', in: C.-H. de Fouchécour & Ph. Gignoux (eds.), *Études irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard* (StIr Cahier 7), Paris 1989, 217-228, has given an exhaustive overview of the verb *dā-* ("to give" and "to create") to conclude that Ahura Mazdā's creative act is referred to in terms of "putting into place," not of "creating (from nothing)." Far from proving that Ahura Mazdā is therefore not a creator-god, this shows that Ahura Mazdā's creative act is strikingly similar to the creative act of God in *Genesis* 1, which likewise attributes to God not a *creatio ex nihilo* but the ordering of the creation from primal matter. The idea of a *creatio ex nihilo* is a Christian invention from the second century: cf. G. May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts. Die Entstehung der Lehre von der Creatio ex Nihilo* (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 48), Berlin-New York 1978.

[70] For an introduction, cf. the various articles by F.B.J. Kuiper colllected in his *Ancient Indian Cosmogony*, Delhi 1983.

[71] For the Arabic traditions, cf. Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 234; for Syriac traditions, cf. E. Benveniste, 'Le témoignage de Théodore bar Konay sur le Zoroastrisme', *Le Monde Oriental* 26-27 (1932-1933), 170-215; cf. also Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419-443.

Such a plurality of views should not obscure the fact that there is a version of the cosmogony and the eschatology that is encountered most often; it has been preserved in the most complete form in the *Greater Bundahišn*. Depending on one's choice of words, one might refer to this version as the normative, orthodox or mainstream version of Zoroastrian views on the cosmic drama. The catch seems to be, however, that there is no indication that other versions were considered heterodox.

5. *The three approaches compared: the status of Zurvanism*

We can illustrate the working of the three approaches with the example of Zurvanism, which will also be the subject of ch. 4.4.2. Already at the beginning of the academic study of Zoroastrianism, it was noticed that there existed a variety of Zoroastrianism, in which Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu were not conceived of as original opposed beings, but were presented as the offspring of a deity of Time, called Zurvan. In connection with this idea, a myth was found in Armenian, Greek and Syriac literature according to which the primal deity, Zurvan, wishing to have a son who would create the world and be a lord over it, brought sacrifices for a period of 1,000 years and became pregnant with the beneficent deity Ohrmazd. During the thousand years of sacrifices, however, Zurvan had a moment of doubt and from this doubt originated the evil spirit Ahreman. Ohrmazd and Ahreman were thus twin-brothers in their father's womb. Zurvan, realising that he had two sons where he would have wanted only one, made the promise to grant the sovereignty over the world to his firstborn. Immediately, Ahreman pierced his womb and went before his father. Zurvan asked him: "Who are you?" and Ahreman answered: "I am your son, Ohrmazd." Then Zurvan said that this could not be so, but that his son Ohrmazd was radiant and fragrant, whereas this son was ugly and had a bad stench. Then Ohrmazd came to his father; at the moment when Zurvan wanted to grant the sovereignty over the world to Ohrmazd, Ahreman reminded his father of his promise to grant this sovereignty to his firstborn. Therefore, Zurvan gave the sovereignty over the world to Ahreman, but made Ohrmazd lord over Ahreman; he also promised that the latter would be defeated in the end.[72]

From this point onwards, the myths appear to follow the standard Zoroastrian cosmogony. Interest in this variety of Zoroastrian myth was at a peak at the beginning of this century, specifically among those scholars associated with the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, for they saw in it the origins of the Hellenistic speculations on the divinised concept of time Aion.[73] The interest in the subject is evident: the system as presented in this myth is a monistic reworking of dualism, which accords a place of lesser dignity to Ahura Mazdā, because he is no longer the primal divine being, but the son of the only original god and the brother of the Evil Spirit. The idea of Zurvanism slowly grew into a convenient receptacle, where several aspects of Zoroastrian doctrine which did not make sense from the point of view of certain conceptions of Zoroastrian doctrine could find their place. Thus, fatalistic ideology, an obsession with the notion of time, the worship of Angra Mainyu, misogyny and suchlike were all classified as "Zurvanite elements" in Zoroastrianism. We encounter once again the wish to preserve an idealised picture of Zoroastrianism—as a lofty, ethical, strictly logical faith—from the possible threats posed by irrational and less than lofty manifestations of this religion.[74] A convenient origin for these aspects was also to be found: Babylon, where Zoroastrianism became contaminated with astrology and fatalism.

The subject of Zurvanism underwent wholly different treatments from the three perspectives introduced in ch. 2.2-4. We shall take as examples the discussions of Zurvanism in the work of H.S. Nyberg and G. Widengren (fragmentising), M. Boyce (harmonising) and S. Shaked (diversifying).[75]

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[72] The main evidence for this myth is found in Armenian and Syriac literature; cf. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419-429; for the Greek variant, cf. the passage of Theodorus of Mopsuestia, in *Zurvan*, 447; and cf. ch. 4.4 for a commentary.

[73] W. Bousset, 'Der Gott Aion', in *idem*, *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (ed. by A.F. Verheule, Suppl.Nov.Test. 50), Leiden 1979, 192-230; F. Junker, 'Über iranische Quellen der hellenistischen Aion-Vorstellung', *Vortr.Bibl.Warburg* 1921-1922, 125-178; R. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, Bonn 1921, 151-250.

[74] Cf. for this strategy the examples given in de Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', or J.R. Russell, 'On Mysticism and Esotericism among the Zoroastrians', *IrStud* 26 (1993), 73-94, pp. 73-74.

[75] H.S. Nyberg, 'Questions de cosmogonie et de cosmologie mazdéennes', *JA* 214 (1929), 193-310; 219 (1931), 1-134; 193-244 (repr. in *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg IV* (AI 7), Teheran-Liège 1975, 75-378); *Religionen* 380-390; Widengren:

In Nyberg and Widengren's appreciations, Zurvan is an ancient Median god, and Zurvanism the pre-Zoroastrian Median religion,[76] propagated by the Median Magi and brought into Zoroastrianism when these Magi were converted; during this process of conversion, they adapted their inherited sacred literature superficially to the new Eastern Iranian faith, thus producing the Vendidād and the Dāmdād Nask.[77] Zurvanism, in other words, was a different religion altogether, not a departure from a Zoroastrian norm, but a variety of Iranian religiosity, to be localised in Media, centred around a high god Zurvān, who absorbed all notions of "time" and "destiny" as well as the notion of "fortune."[78] In later periods, Zurvanism—though part of Zoroastrianism—developed along the lines of its most typical characteristics: fatalism, time-speculations and higher regard for the evil spirit on account of their shared origin. In the many contributions to the history of Zurvanism by Widengren, these developments were pushed further and further: the Parthians were the successors of the Medes, and therefore in all likelihood Zurvanites; in the Parthian period, we can detect Zurvanite influences on the proto-Mandaeans, on Gnosticism and on nascent Manicheism.[79]

Some of the basic elements of fragmentising approaches may be detected here: the recognition of separate religions; the reliance on correspondences between linguistic differences and differences in religious traditions; the attempt at exact geographical and sociological localisation of particular developments. Such an approach has its attractions, for it succeeds remarkably well in producing order out of chaos, system out of disparate scraps of

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Hochgottglaube im alten Iran (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 1938:6), Lund 1938, 266-310; 'Stand und Aufgaben', 77-80; *Religionen*, 149-151; 214-222 etc. Boyce: *HZ* II, 231-242; 'Some Reflections on Zurvanism', *BSOAS* 19 (1957), 304-316; 'Some Further Reflections on Zurvanism', in: *Iranica Varia. Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (AI 30), Leiden 1990, 20-29. Shaked: 'Myth of Zurvan'.

[76] Nyberg, *Religionen*, 388: "Der Zervanismus ist die besondere Ausgestaltung der alten medischen Religion der Magier vor der Ankunft des Zoroastrismus; er ist die Religion der Magier." One of the main clues to the high antiquity of Zurvanism, was the quadruple mention of Ahura Mazdā in the thirty days of the calendar; according to Nyberg this was a reference to Zurvan, who manifests himself in tetrads (*Religionen*, 380).

[77] Widengren, 'Stand und Aufgaben' II, 78; Nyberg, *Religionen*, 391-394.

[78] Widengren, *Hochgottglaube*, 271-274.

[79] Cf. particularly 'Manichaeism and its Iranian Background', *CHI* 3, 965-990. For a critique of the procedures involved, cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', *passim*.

evidence. The disadvantages of this approach, however, exceed its advantages. The system thus produced is in all its aspects a construct based on little more than speculative connections that are, in many cases, massively contradicted by the evidence. Even if one leaves out the unlikely notion of a Median pre-Zoroastrian Zurvanism, the theory of Zurvanism as a separate religion that has malformed Zoroastrianism throughout its Western Iranian history is unattractive in several respects: it is arbitrary, because it removes *a priori* much of the theology from its place in Zoroastrian thought; it is circular, because its point of departure is equal to the results of the investigation (a Median Zurvanism); it is also historically unlikely, because there is nothing that distinguishes Zurvanism from Zoroastrianism in any other aspect than the myth on the cosmogony.

In the work of Boyce, Zurvanism is not considered a separate religion, but has acquired the status of a heresy. Zurvanism may be fruitfully contrasted with orthodox Zoroastrianism, and can thus be seen to have been a departure from the orthodox Zoroastrian cosmogony, based on an alternative exegesis of Y. 30.3 (the passage where the two spirits are proclaimed to be twins), spurred by the wish to accommodate certain Babylonian speculations connected with time, fate and astrology. Boyce leaves no doubt as to her appreciation of this heresy, for it is based on "tedious and ignoble myths" and in their creation of this theology, the Zurvanites "betrayed Zoroaster's doctrine in fundamental ways."[80]

Thus, Boyce begins with a notion of Zoroaster's doctrine, the development of which may be traced from the Gāthās through the Younger Avesta to the Pahlavi books and basically consists of an emphasis on the greatness of the supreme deity Ahura Mazdā, who created everything and is eternal; the recognition of his adversary, who is responsible for all evil, but will be defeated at the end of time; the moral responsibility of man to distinguish and choose between good and evil and the consequences of this choice for his or her afterlife and for the fate of the world at large. Against this ethical, simple system, the hybrid nature of Zurvanism comes out with full clarity: it deprives Ahura Mazdā of his supreme position, by making him subordinate to another deity; it accords greater power to the Evil Spirit; it removes the ethical component of Zoroaster's teaching, by stressing the element of fate and the subordination of mankind to arbitrary divine decisions.

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[80] *HZ* II, 238.

Boyce fully recognises the orthopraxy of Zurvanism. In ritual matters as well as in a large section of doctrine, the Zurvanites did not distinguish themselves from their orthodox co-religionists. Zurvanism can therefore not have been an alternative religion, but must have been an alternative variant of Zoroastrianism, or a heresy. This heresy grew very strong in the Sasanian period, where most kings and their subjects were Zurvanites, and it is to this period that Boyce assigns the Avestan references to Zurvan and related divinities.[81] Nevertheless, she assigns the origin of Zurvanism to the Achaemenian period, largely on the basis of some Greek passages.

This interpretation of the data also has its attractions. It shows Zoroastrianism to have been a basically coherent, simple formulation of man's religious duties; it shows, moreover, the persistence of this pattern throughout the long history of the faith, and it avoids the curious situation of postulating a plurality of detached Iranian religions for which not a scrap of sound evidence can be produced. The shortcomings are equally eye-catching: the notion of "orthodoxy" for Zoroastrianism is already problematic, even though most historians of that faith will—consciously or unconsciously—work with similar notions of Zoroastrianism; but the contents of that reconstructed orthodoxy are almost too good to be true. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that this orthodoxy is no less a modern construct than the "pure" Zoroastrianism of the first approach, establishing unity and cohesion as a norm, by relegating all that disturbs this image to a postulated departure from this norm. Worse, in this respect, is the fact that there is not a speck of evidence that suggests that Zurvanism was at any period, or in the mind of any Zoroastrian theologian, ever considered a heresy. Quite on the contrary, in various works the "orthodoxy" of which cannot be in doubt (such as the *Greater Bundahišn*), Zurvanite speculations have found a natural place in the presentation of the scheme of things.

This led Shaked to the conclusion that "Zurvanism as an organized religious system is a scholarly invention which lacks historical substance."[82] In order to support this argument, Shaked makes two important observations: there is not more than one line of polemic against Zurvanism as a heretical movement, whereas there is no shortage whatsoever on polemic against other heretical views; and there are many more variant stories on the cosmogony, which one cannot but accept as having existed side by side. Zurvanism, in Shaked's reconstruction, "was merely a fairly inoffensive form of the Zoroastrian myth of creation, one of several. There never were any Zurvanite heretics because the adherents of Zurvan as supreme god were simply Zoroastrians. This is how they must have regarded themselves, and it was in this manner that they were regarded by other Zoroastrians."[83]

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[81] *HZ* II, 237-241.

[82] 'Myth of Zurvan', 228.

This view has important consequences, for it restores to Zoroastrian history a multitude of different views on theological subjects which can then be accepted as part of a broadly defined Zoroastrianism. It shows, moreover, that these various theological positions could and did exist side by side, which raises some important questions not only on the subject of the transmission of religious doctrine and knowledge, but also on questions pertaining to the definition of Zoroastrianism itself.

If a narrow view of Zoroastrianism can only work when all that falls outside this view is relegated to a different religion or to a disputable notion of heterodoxy, can a broad and preliminary view of Zoroastrianism work at all, without resulting in a situation where all and everything Iranian will be considered Zoroastrian? In other words, what were the boundaries of Zoroastrianism and what, if any, were the other indigenous religious traditions among speakers of Iranian languages that must be considered non-Zoroastrian? There is a vast field of research here, to which the present book will attempt to make a contribution.

6. *Oral religious traditions and the specialisation of knowledge*

In the middle of the fourth century CE, the Cappadocian theologian Basil of Caesarea remarked on the Magusaeans of Cappadocia that there were no books among them, nor teachers of religion. Religious education, in those Zoroastrian communities, was a family matter: the son was taught his religion by his father.[84] Although the latter part of his remarks—the absence of teachers of religion—raises some problems, the information that there were no books among the Zoroastrians of Cappadocia appropriately points to the fact that Zoroastrianism in antiquity was an oral religious tradition.

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[83] Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 232.

In Zoroastrianism, as in the Indian religious traditions, the transmission of religious knowledge and texts was the exclusive domain of a specialised priesthood. For the earliest periods of the faith, the oral transmission of the texts and traditions was the only possible way, because Iranians had not yet come to know the art of writing. In later periods, when writing was used for secular matters as well as for matters of religious administration, it was not used in the transmission of religious texts and knowledge. This situation changed gradually in the Sasanian period, when attempts were made not only to establish a canon of religious texts—there had been such attempts already in the Parthian period—but also to commit them to writing. For this purpose a special alphabet was developed, which for reasons of palaeography cannot have been invented prior to the fourth century CE.[85] Even after the writing down of the Avesta, however, the texts continued to be transmitted orally, together with the accompanying translations, commentaries and theological works. This, at least, is suggested by the large body of literature in Middle Persian, which is commonly dated for the main part in the ninth century CE, but has preserved many texts that can only be understood as the repositories of traditions that have gradually grown orally.

The oral background of Zoroastrianism is always acknowledged in treatments of that tradition, even though its implications are rarely taken into account. Zoroastrian studies are most often concerned with questions relating to the ancient and mediaeval worlds, and they are based on a study of the texts from these periods. There is a paradox here, because on the one hand the orality of the tradition is always underlined and on the other, the subject is studied as if it was a written tradition.[86] Taking into account the process of transmission and the implications of such a system, however, is an indispensable aspect of any reconstruction of Zoroastrian history.

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[84] Basil, *Epistle* 258.4.

[85] Cf. J. Kellens, 'Avestique', *CLI* 32-55, pp. 32-33; Hoffmann & Narten, *Der Sasanidische Archetypus*, 23-37.

[86] Cf. the trenchant remarks by P.G. Kreyenbroek, 'The Zoroastrian Tradition from an Oralist's Point of View', paper read at the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay in 1994, to be published in the JCOI.

There has been little interest in the Iranian traditions among specialists in oral literature and oral traditions, as there has been little interest in methodological work on oral cultures among Iranianists. Some of the problems that have occupied a central place in the discussions on oral traditions, moreover, are only of marginal interest to the problems posed by the Iranian traditions. This seems particularly true, for instance, for the discussion on Homer and the techniques of long epic compositions and related research in which the absence of the idea of word-for-word memorisation of texts is stressed and the possibility of a concept of a fixed text in oral cultures is denied.[87] The more recent stress on "performance," the interplay between the singer and his audience, and the fluidity of oral traditions likewise run counter to the situation as suggested by the Iranian religious traditions. There appears to be a growing consensus, however, that in specifically religious or ritual contexts, different rules apply to the genre and the fluidity of oral compositions.[88]

Much has also been written on the so-called "literacy thesis" according to which the invention of writing has profound consequences for the working of the human mind. Some scholars have argued that certain faculties of the human mind, such as logic and abstract thinking, as well as certain consequences of these, such as a distinction between myth and history and the development, change and critique of religious doctrine, can only be achieved in literate cultures.[89] In this discussion, Vedic literature has frequently been treated. In the case of the Vedas, just like the Iranian traditions, the common assumption is that these texts were composed and transmitted orally.[90] Advocates of the literacy thesis have questioned this assumption, because various parts of Vedic literature belong to genres that are seen as part of literate cultures.[91] Specialists in Vedic literature will have to judge the strengths and weaknesses of these challenges to conventional approaches to Vedic literature. It would seem that those Vedic texts which presuppose gesture (for instance by giving ritual directions without specifying them) can hardly be understood as literary compositions.[92]

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[87] Cf. for an introduction and a copious bibliography A.B. Lord, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*, Ithaca/London 1991. Lord's essay 'Homer's Originality: Oral Dictated Texts', *TAPA* 94 (1953), 124-134, reprinted in *Epic Singers*, 38-48, is a good example of the approach: he denies *disertis verbis* the possibility of word-for-word memorisation and the concept of a fixed text (p. 44).

[88] W.A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge 1987; cf. also W.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the World*, London/New York 1982 (1989^2) 62-63; J. Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, Cambridge etc. 1987 (1991^4) 110-112; 175-177.

[89] For an overview of the different positions, cf. M. de Jong, 'Geletterd en ongeletterd: over zin en onzin van een tegenstelling', in: R.E.V. Stuip & C. Vellekoop (eds.), *Oraliteit en schriftcultuur* (Utrechtse bijdragen tot de Mediëvistiek 12), Hilversum 1993, 9-31.

The Iranian situation is usually treated in a manner comparable to the Indian texts: the Avesta and the Pahlavi books are regarded as oral compositions. They have been composed and transmitted orally for many generations, and have been committed to writing only relatively late. The oldest part of the Avesta, the Gāthās and the Yasna Haptanghāiti, have been transmitted in a different and remarkably archaic dialect, which is generally explained as the result of an early word-for-word transmission of these texts, without significant alterations. Such a state of affairs can only be achieved, it seems, if an ideological choice is made to preserve these texts as they have been composed; the texts have been considered of supreme sanctity throughout the Zoroastrian tradition, and it is commonly assumed that the Gāthās indeed are as close to the *ipsissima verba* of Zarathustra as one can get. Some scholars have argued that the other Old Avestan texts may also have been composed by Zarathustra.[93] With regard to the Younger Avestan texts, particularly the great hymns, speculating on their date and place of origin appears to be pointless. It is commonly assumed that these texts developed and were adapted continually until the Achaemenian period, when the texts, it seems, became "fixed" largely because of the inability of the Western Iranian priests to compose in Avestan.[94]

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[90] For a straightforward introduction to these matters, cf. S.W. Jamison, *The Ravenous Hyenas and the Wounded Sun. Myth and Ritual in Ancient India*, Ithaca/ London 1991, 5-16.

[91] J. Goody, 'Oral Composition and Oral Transmission: the Case of the Vedas', *Interface*, 110-122; for a different perspective, cf. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 67-77.

[92] For example Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 1.47, with the commentary of H.W. Bodewitz, *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa I, 1-65. Translation and Commentary* (ORT 17), Leiden 1973, 140-143 with n. 9.

[93] E.g. J. Narten, *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, 35-37; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 87-94.

[94] Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 27-30; Kreyenbroek, 'Zoroastrian Tradition.'

It is beyond doubt that transmission of the Avestan texts was a priestly prerogative, but it was not the only occupation of the priesthood. The priests were not only responsible for ritual, which was the domain of Avestan literature, but also for theology. The Avestan texts were the basis for this theology, for they contained the words of the prophet and the divine revelations.[95] The only translation of Avestan texts we have, however, the Middle Persian *Zand*, shows that the understanding of Avestan was far from perfect. It is unclear to what extent this imperfect understanding of Avestan influenced the development of Zoroastrian doctrine.

The transmission of theology, the translation of the Avesta and the commentaries on the Avestan texts was the responsibility of a class of priests known by the Avestan title of *aēθrapaiti-*, Middle Persian *hērbed*.[96] In Islamic sources, the word came to indicate a ritual priest, but in Pahlavi literature and in the Avesta, the *hērbed* is not a ritual priest but a priestly teacher or a scholar-priest. Connected with these priests was the *hērbedestān*, a term that can refer both to the place where religious education is provided and to the religious education itself. From the most important text devoted to these courses in religious studies, the *Hērbedestān*, it has become clear that religious studies could be attended by lay Zoroastrians as well as by priestly students.[97] In these courses, the sacred texts were learnt, together with their translation and exegetical glosses (*Zand*) and individual points of ritual and doctrine could be taken up.

Because the Pahlavi sources presuppose knowledge of the realities of religious or priestly studies, the clearest evidence for the practicalities of oral instruction comes from foreign observations of religious education.[98] The Greek references to the Persian religious educations will be discussed in ch. 4.8.4, but possibly the most illuminating reference to Zoroastrian religious education has been found in the seventh-century Syriac life of Yeshu-Sabran.[99] He was a former Zoroastrian converted to Christianity, who went in search of religious instruction. He therefore asked his Christian teachers to recite ten psalms to him and immediately repeated these texts loudly, while making strong movements with his head. He was then warned by his teacher not to do this, but to learn the scripture as the Christians do, by relying on texts.

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[95] For a discussion of the Avesta as a "text" cf. the interesting contribution by J.W. Boyd, 'Zoroastrianism: Avestan Scripture and Rite', in: F.M. Denny & R.L. Taylor (eds.), *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective*, Columbia 1985, 109-125.

[96] For these priests, cf. M.-L. Chaumont, 'Recherches sur le clergé zoroastrien: Le hērbad', *RHR* 158 (1960), 55-80; 161-179; Kreyenbroek, 'Zoroastrian Priesthood', *passim*.

[97] Cf. Kotwal & Kreyenbroek, *Hērbedestān*, 15-20.

[98] The evidence from the *Herbedestān* elucidates some practical matters as well, for instance the duration of the priestly studies (*H.* 4).

The consequences of the oral transmission of religious knowledge relevant to the present study seem to be far-reaching. The Zoroastrian traditions that survive in the Pahlavi books are, with slight exceptions, learned priestly traditions. This situation makes two questions particularly urgent: 1) how much of the priestly traditions was known and relevant to the laity? 2) how unified and coherent were the priestly traditions themselves? Answers to these two questions are not easy to give, but some suggestions can be made.

The question of lay and priestly religious traditions is difficult to answer, because we do not have many sources that are relevant to the religious life of the Zoroastrian laity. We can distinguish between the different types of traditions in, for instance, the *Dēnkard* on the one hand and the *Pahlavi Rivāyats* on the other. Part of the traditions preserved in the *Dēnkard* belongs to highly technical, almost philosophical, traditions which cannot have affected the laity very much. The *Rivāyats*, on the contrary, appear to be collections of disparate subjects, in which not only many practical prescriptions have been preserved, but also many variant myths and doctrines. They reflect the Zoroastrian religious life to a far more accurate degree than the speculations in the more philosophical works.[100]

A particular genre that must also have affected the laity is the *andarz*-literature, examples of which survive in the *Dēnkard*[101] and in separate texts.[102] These are the main examples of Iranian wisdom literature: collections of gnomic sayings intended for instruction and encouragement. It is likely that those who consulted priests or took religious instruction, were partly educated with such sayings. Finally, one might consider the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* as an important source for the religious life of the laity, because it is written as an answer to questions asked by the Zoroastrian communities from one of their supreme leaders.[103] Some of the texts that are mentioned here as relevant are from the Islamic period and reflect the situation of the Zoroastrians as it obtained under Islamic rule. There are, moreover, limits to the subjects treated, because these are often dependent upon the urge of the laity to be informed on certain problems. Those areas which were not problematic sometimes remain somewhat in the dark; that is at least a common assumption in the interpretation of these texts. The texts, moreover, show us only what the priests (or an individual theologian) considered important for the laity to know.

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[99] For references, cf. Chaumont, 'Recherches sur le clergé zoroastrien', 63-64; J.C. Greenfield, *'rṭyn mgwš*", in S.B. Hoenig & L.D. Stitskin (eds.), *Joshua Finkel Festschrift*, New York 1974, 63-69, pp. 68-69.

[100] Cf. Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat* I, 7-19.

[101] S. Shaked, *The Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, Boulder 1979.

[102] Such as the *Andarz ī dānāgān ō māzdēsnān* or the *Cīdag andarz ī pōryōtkēšān* (or *Pand-nāmag ī Zardušt*): PhlT 41-54. For an introduction to the genre, cf. Shaked, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, xv-xviii. Shaked makes a distinction between popular (secular) and more sophisticated (priestly) *andarz*-literature.

A further complicating factor is the structure of spiritual authority that dominated evolved Zoroastrianism in the ancient world:[104] every lay member of the Zoroastrian community lived under the obligation to choose a priest as his spiritual authority (*dastwar*) with whom he or she should discuss all problems. Lay members of the community were obliged to obey the priest in his decisions. The priests, after all, were the guardians of the religious traditions and therefore thought to be well equipped to decide on religious matters.

Some speculation on the implications of these aspects of Zoroastrianism therefore seems appropriate. Religious education was partly a matter of the family. Parents had to instruct their children in the basic elements of the religion.[105] Priests also contributed to the religious education, by teaching courses in religious studies (*hērbedestān*) and by giving advice on religious matters.[106]

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[103] Cf. P.G. Kreyenbroek, 'The Introduction to the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*', in: Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 171-176.

[104] For this subject, cf. P.G. Kreyenbroek, 'On the Concept of Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism', *JSAI* 17 (1994), 1-15.

[105] Cf. *CAP* 34 (PhlT 42): "Fathers and mothers must teach this much of works and virtues to their children before they reach (the age of) fifteen years" (*pid ud mād frazand ī xwēš rāy ēn and kār ud kirbag pēš az 15 sāl be hammōxtan abāyēd*).

[106] In the idealised version of the *CAP* 8 (PhlT. 43), the day of a religious Zoroastrian is divided thus: "The fifth (duty) is to go to *hērbedestān* and to seek wisdom of righteous men for a third of the day and a third of the night; to till

Such a system offers good possibilities for the transmission of what one might call normative Zoroastrianism. This normative Zoroastrianism is evidenced in the Pahlavi books; there, however, we also encounter many variants of beliefs and myths. It seems impossible to harmonise these into a unified tradition. They rather suggest that Zoroastrianism at some points was a remarkably flexible tradition.

Regional variants must have existed and are sometimes reconstructed. These regional variants are detectable in lands that were entirely Zoroastrian,[107] but especially so in regions that were Zoroastrianised or regions where Zoroastrians came to live with the expansion of Persian dominion.[108] The Classical texts on the religion of the Persians are partly devoted to the religious life of those Zoroastrians who lived among the Greeks. They therefore can be expected to offer information on the changes in religious life among expatriate Zoroastrians. This evidence, in turn, should be compared with the Iranian priestly traditions, to find out if common features in ritual and doctrine were shared by all Zoroastrians, and to reconstruct the ways in which variant beliefs and practices developed.

(the soil) and cultivate (the land) for a third of the day and a third of the night; and to eat, enjoy and rest one third of the day and one third of the night" (*panjom 3 ēk ī rōz ud šab ō hērbedestān šudan ud xrad ī ahlawān pursīdan; 3 ēk ī rōz ud 3 ēk ī šab warz ud ābādānīh kardan ud 3 ēk ī rōz ud 3 ēk ī šab xwardan ud rāmišn ud āsāyišn kardan*).

[107] E.g. B. Marshak, 'The Historico-cultural Significance of the Sogdian Calendar', *Iran* 30 (1992), 145-154.

[108] Most materials in this respect are from Armenia and Georgia, where the local religions merged with Zoroastrian traditions.

CHAPTER THREE

A COMMENTARY ON FIVE SELECTED LONGER PASSAGES

1. *Herodotus,* Histories *1.131-132*

1. *Introduction*[1]

Herodotus of Halicarnassus (as he introduces himself, *Histories* 1.0) was a man who combined exceptional curiosity with an urge to communicate what he had learnt. Little is known with certainty concerning his life. He was born in Halicarnassus around 480 BCE, but it is unknown for how long he has actually lived there. He has travelled widely throughout the ancient world (he visited at least Egypt and the Black Sea Region), and there are indications that he lived on Samos and in Athens for considerable periods. He is said to have been among the founders of Thurii in Southern Italy, where he died around 425 BCE. Already in antiquity, he was simultaneously honoured with the title *pater historiae* and blamed for interspersing his narrative with countless fictitious stories.[2] This double reputation continues to haunt his work to the present day.

Herodotus' book, universally acknowledged as one of the great works of literature of Classical antiquity, has been exhaustively studied throughout its long history, both by Classicists and by specialists on the many non-Greek cultures Herodotus described. It is therefore not surprising that a great variety of views have been expressed concerning the value of his observations of Greek and non-Greek cultures. Having been provided with thorough introductions and commentaries at the beginning of the present century,[3] the *Histories* were studied with a particular stress on the validation of Herodotus' information, both concerning Greek history and concerning the history of other ancient cultures, a process that still continues.

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[1] The literature on Herodotus is vast, and therefore only some recent work is mentioned here. For an excellent introductory survey, cf. C. Dewald & J. Marincola, 'A Selective Introduction to Herodotan Studies', *Arethusa* 20 (1987), 9-40. Several important collections of articles exist: *Arethusa* 20 (1987); *Storia della Storiografia* 7 (1985); *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 35 (1988); W. Marg (ed.), *Herodot. Eine Auswahl aus der neueren Forschung* (WdF 26), Darmstadt 1962. For an overview of earlier views on Herodotus, cf. the 'Doxographie' in H. Drexler, *Herodot-Studien*, Hildesheim/New York 1972, 187-227; for general introductions to Herodotus' life and work, cf. J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus*, Boston 1982; J. Gould, *Herodotus*, London 1989; J. Hart, *Herodotus and Greek History*, New York 1982; for an anthropological approach towards the *Histories*, cf. W. Nippel, 'Ethnographie und Anthropologie bei Herodot', in: W. Nippel, *Griechen, Barbaren und "Wilde"*, Frankfurt 1990, 11-29.

[2] Cicero, *De Legibus* 1.1.5: *quamquam et apud Herodotum, patrem historiae, et apud Theopompum sunt innumerabiles fabulae.*

In recent decades, Herodotus' work has been the subject of several debates. Some of these, such as the discussion on the technique of composition and the unity of the work are of less importance for the present book, which is by necessity atomistic in singling out a tiny portion of the *Histories* to understand Herodotus' interest in and knowledge of the religion of the Persians.[4] Most discussions, however, have been conducted on a subject that is of critical importance to the present book: Herodotus' reliability.

The discussion on the reliability of Herodotus' *Histories* has been conducted both on a specialist level with regard to the separate *Logoi* on foreign peoples,[5] and on a more general one, taking into account general structures of Herodotus' handling of his sources and the interplay of investigation, communication and prejudice. At both levels, it seems, the study of Herodotus has suffered much from attempts to explain all problems connected with his ethnographic descriptions in a single theory.[6] It is only natural that different questions produce different answers. Hartog's innovative study of the Scythian *logos* in the *Histories* is one way of looking at the text, and perhaps one that does more justice to Herodotus as an author.[7] Those interested in Scythian *realia*, however, will find it largely irrelevant, if only because Hartog does not take into account any comparative materials from the Scytho-Sarmatian area. A similar state of affairs was already described 25 years ago by C.W. Fornara: "To historians, Herodotus is the Father of History about whose lapses we can afford to be charitable because his followers perfected the genre. To literary critics, his book is a 'work of art' the genesis of which is relatively unimportant. Both schools of thought seem to me to misjudge Herodotus' achievement because of general presuppositions and prejudices actually irrelevant."[8]

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[3] F. Jacoby, 'Herodotus', *RE* Suppl. 2 (1913), 205-520, reprinted in F. Jacoby, *Griechische Historiker*, Stuttgart 1956; W.W. How & J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, Oxford 1928^2, many reprints.

[4] For the discussion on the (lack of) unity and the composition of the *Histories*, cf. H.F. Bornitz, *Herodot-studien. Beiträge zum Verständnis der Einheit des Geschichtswerks*, Berlin 1968; J. Cobet, *Herodots Exkurse und die Frage der Einheit seines Werkes*, Wiesbaden 1971; H. Wood, *The Histories of Herodotus. An Analysis of the Formal Structure*, The Hague 1972.

[5] Particularly with regard to Egypt: contrast, for instance F. Oertel, *Herodots ägyptischer Logos und die Glaubwürdigkeit Herodots*, Bonn 1970, with A.B. Lloyd, *Herodotus. Book II.*

[6] The best-known example is D. Fehling, *Die Quellenangabe bei Herodot. Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots*, Berlin-New York 1971: Fehling argues that *all* source citations given by Herodotus are false or irrelevant. The latest, book-length, refutation of his critical demonstrations of these passages (W.K. Pritchett, *The Liar School of Herodotos*, Amsterdam 1993, 10-143) appears to be a blow from which the work will not be able to recover.

In a commentary such as this, questions of the unity of Herodotus' work are of necessity irrelevant. Herodotus' reliability is very relevant, but it seems that no general remarks can be made on this subject and that, therefore, a comparison of Herodotus' information on the Persian religion with Iranian materials should be considered a valid subject of inquiry. There are some general problems and structures that need to be discussed separately before such a comparison can be made: the sources available to Herodotus on Persian customs, the concept of *nomos* in the *Histories*, and Herodotus' attitude towards religion and religions.

a. *Herodotus' sources*

Opinions on the reliability of Herodotus' description of the Persian religion have varied considerably, dependent on general assumptions scholars hold on the Persian religion, which they do or do not find reflected in Herodotus' account. To contrast two well-known examples, Benveniste, certain that the religion of the Achaemenians was not Zoroastrianism, considered Herodotus to present an eyewitness account of pre-Zoroastrian Iranian nature-worship and even thought it almost certain that Herodotus had travelled widely in Iran, whereas C.P. Tiele, convinced of the opposite, accused Herodotus of being a fraud who was fortunately shown to be wrong by the OP inscriptions.[9] This working of preconceived ideas is almost inevitable, given the state of our knowledge on Iranian religions in the Achaemenian period.

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[7] Hartog, *Miroir d'Hérodote*, *passim*: cf. ch. 1.3.

[8] C.W. Fornara, *Herodotus. An Interpretative Essay*, Oxford 1971, p. VII.

[9] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 22-49, *passim*. C.P. Tiele, *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst in de Oudheid tot op Alexander den Groote*, vol. II, Amsterdam 1902, 340.

Generally speaking, the division of Herodotus' source material between what he witnessed, heard or read and what he deduced or knew beforehand, a division indicated in the *Histories* by Herodotus himself,[10] is pivotal to one's understanding of Herodotus. The processes have been surveyed in an excellent manner in Lloyd's commentary on Herodotus' book on Egypt and in Lateiner's assessment of Herodotus' historiographical method.[11]

Herodotus never visited Iran—at least, he never mentions such a visit. He did spend part of his life as an inhabitant of the Persian Empire or of areas that were or had been subject to Persian sovereignty (Halicarnassus, Samos), although the greater part of his life he lived in cities and areas that had never been under Persian control (Athens, Thurii). His travels in Egypt, Asia Minor and the Black Sea region were all conducted when these areas were firmly under Persian rule, and he therefore must have had ample opportunities to communicate with Persians as well as with men and women living under Persian dominion, and to witness certain elements of Persian expatriate life.

Lloyd makes a distinction between hearsay—including the written word and autopsy—and deduction, as the two main types of sources available to Herodotus. With regard to his description of the Persians, this means that he could have relied upon earlier written sources on Iran and the Persians, on travel reports from Greeks and others who had visited Iran and on the expatriate life of Persian settlers and conquerors, but—as opposed to his testimony on Egypt—Herodotus did not personally witness things Iranian in Iran itself.

As a possible source, then, we must focus first on possible earlier Greek *Persica* or other written sources available to Herodotus. In Greek literary history, several authors are credited with having written *Persica*. The most important of these are Dionysius of Miletus, Hellanicus of Lesbos and Charon of Lampsacus.[12]

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[10] Noticeable in our passage by the contrast between Herodotus' assertion "I know" (οἶδα) and "as it seems to me" (ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ δοϰέειν). For such usages, cf. Evans, *Herodotus. Explorer of the Past*, 106.

[11] Lloyd, *Herodotus. Book II*, vol. I, 77-140; D. Lateiner, *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Phoenix Suppl.Vol. 23), Toronto etc. 1989.

[12] For these authors, cf. the overview in R. Drews, *Greek Accounts*, 20-44, who offers bibliographical references, but whose chronology is not universally followed. Cf. also L. Pearson, *Early Ionian Historians*, Oxford 1939; F. Jacoby,

The exact scope and contents of their works—of which next to nothing has survived—as well as the dates of these works in relation to Herodotus' *Histories*, are little known. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to assess the impact the earlier *Persica* may have had on Herodotus. From the fragments of these authors that did survive, however, it has become clear that they attached much weight to myths and popular etymologies, a procedure Herodotus makes fun of—possibly mocking their approach and thereby discarding their reliability—in the proem to his own *Histories*.[13]

The problems are different with regard to the literary relations between Herodotus and Hecataeus of Miletus, whose work Herodotus certainly knew and used. He refers to this early ethnographer, whom he calls *logopoios*, "prose-writer or chronicler", several times (2.143; 5.36; 5.125-126; 6.137).[14] Earlier in this century, the importance of Hecataeus for Herodotus seems to have been overrated, sometimes even to the extent that Herodotus' information was regarded as a calque on Hecataeus' earlier achievements.[15] In fact, however, Herodotus mostly disagrees with Hecataeus and presents clear efforts to supersede his predecessor in all respects. He did not trust Hecataeus' information and the attractive suggestion has been made that part of Herodotus' "historical" methods can be regarded as a reaction against Hecataeus' approach.[16]

Herodotus' dependence on earlier sources is unclear. Even more difficult to assess are the oral inquiries he must have made among Greeks who had been to Iran and among Iranians living abroad. Herodotus refers specifically to the *logioi*, learned men, of the Persians (1.1), who hold certain views on the origin of the

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'Charon von Lampsakos', *SIFC* 15 (1938), 207-242; M. Moggi, 'Autori greci di Persiká I: Dionisio di Mileto', *ASNP* 2 (1972), 433-468; M. Moggi, 'Autori greci di Persiká II: Carone di Lampsaco', *ASNP* 7 (1977), 1-26.

[13] Thus Drews, *Greek Accounts*, 86-90.

[14] For Hecataeus' work, cf. G. Nenci, *Hecataei Milesii Fragmenta*, Firenze 1954. For recent discussions on the relations between Hecataeus and Herodotus, Drews, *Greek Accounts*, 11-19; Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II*, vol. 1, 127-140.

[15] Cf., for instance, W.A. Heidel, *Hecataeus and the Egyptian Priests in Herodotus Book II*, Boston 1935.

[16] Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 93-95. Note, however, that O.K. Armayor, 'Did Herodotus ever go to the Black Sea?', *HSCP* 82 (1978), 45-62, and 'Herodotus' Catalogues of the Persian Empire in the Light of the Monuments and the Greek Literary Tradition', *TAPA* 108 (1978), 1-9, provides recent attempts at reinstating Hecataeus to his earlier reputation.

clash between Europe and Asia,[17] but it is beyond doubt that this does not refer to "real" Persian views of a subject which would only be of marginal interest to the Persians.

Apart from the references to Persian information in 1.1-5 (five times explicitly), Herodotus in fact reports only few times what the Persians say, especially in comparison with his many references to information he gained from the Egyptians.[18] It is often thought that Herodotus did not understand anything of the relevant languages. Evidence to this effect, however, is as rare as evidence to the opposite.[19] The list of Iranian words and names still recognisable in the *Histories* is considerable[20] and includes curiosities such as the Median word for "bitch", *spaka* (*Hist.* 1.110). It has, moreover, been shown that in Athens as well as Sparta documents in Aramaic, the official language of the Achaemenian administration, were translated into Greek, which requires the presence of competent interpreters serving in diplomatic contacts with the Persian empire.[21] Herodotus may have acquired part of his knowledge of Persian history and culture even there.

Another possible group of informants is the substantial number of Greeks working—as artisans or as mercenaries—in the Persian Empire. The list of known Greeks in the Persian empire is already impressive, and the actual number of Greeks who spent some time in the central lands of the Achaemenian kings must have been much more substantial.[22] One of the most illustrious of these is the deposed king Demaratos of Sparta (*Histories* 6.61-70), who has been suggested as Herodotus' source, because of the great number of details Herodotus knows concerning his life.[23] This, however, is not very likely, because of the obvious legendary structures in the narrative on king Demaratos.[24] What the list of Greeks who did go to the Persian Empire does show, however, is that there must have been a steady flow of eyewitness information on Persian life and society, brought back from Iran itself by Greeks who had been there. This information may sometimes have been wrong and prejudiced, but even so it undoubtedly contributed to the general picture of Persian customs that began to emerge among the Greeks of the fifth century BCE, and from which Herodotus can be reasonably expected to have derived part of his information.

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[17] For a convincing interpretation of the proem in the light of Herodotus' criticism of his predecessors, cf. Drews, *Greek Accounts*, 86-90.

[18] Mention of Persian information is made in 1.95; 1.133; 3.1; 3.87; 3.105; 7.12.

[19] His ignorance of Old Persian is usually argued for by referring to his curious remarks on Persian names in *Histories* 1.139; cf. I. Gershevitch, 'The Old Persian Lisp', *PFECIS* 115-133, for a possible explanation.

[20] For the Persian words and names, R. Schmitt, 'Medisches und persisches Sprachgut bei Herodot', *ZDMG* 117 (1967), 119-145, is much to be preferred over O.K. Armayor, 'Herodotos' Persian Vocabulary', *The Ancient World* 1 (1978), 147-156.

[21] Thucydides 4.50; cf. Evans, *Herodotus. Explorer of the Past*, 42-43.

[22] J. Hofstetter, *Die Griechen in Persien. Prosopographie der Griechen im persischen Reich vor Alexander* (AMI Erg.Bd. 5), Berlin 1978. For more work on Greeks in Iran, cf. the bibliographical references in E. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, Grand Rapids 1990, 389-394.

The next group of possible informants are the Persians living in Asia Minor and other parts of the world where Herodotus could have met them and have personal inquiries with them. The favourite candidate among this group is Zopyrus, an Iranian (known by a purely Greek name!), who deserted the Persians and went over to Athens.[25] Although it cannot be excluded that Herodotus did in fact get part of his information from this Zopyrus, there is hardly anything to suggest that he did, apart from the rather circumstantial evidence given by Wells (consisting mainly of a set of putative characteristics of Herodotus' main informant, to which Zopyrus' life as described by Herodotus corresponds best). As has been stressed recently, the idea of a single source for Herodotus' information on Persian history and customs is best abandoned.[26]

The information on Persian customs and specifically on the Persian religion, it has been argued, does not derive from questions Herodotus asked members of the Persian priesthood, the Magi, but rather from non-priestly Persians,[27] more specifically Persians from the warrior estate; Herodotus' information on the education of Persian youngsters seems to agree with the training of young men from that estate (*Histories* 1.136). Herodotus, moreover, does not mention that he obtained information from

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[23] Cf. Burn, *Persia and the Greeks*, index s.v. 'Dāmarātos'. For Demaratos, cf. the bibliography in Hofstetter, *Griechen in Persien*, 46.

[24] W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen. Eine Untersuchung über die volkstümlichen Elemente der altgriechischen Prosaerzählung*, Göttingen 1921 (1969^2), 156-158; and cf. the preceding note.

[25] J. Wells, 'The Persian Friends of Herodotus', *JHS* 27 (1907), 37-47.

[26] D.M. Lewis, 'Persians in Herodotus', in: *The Greek Historians. Papers Presented to A.E. Raubitschek*, Saratoga 1985, 101-117.

[27] Boyce, *HZ* II, 181.

Magi, whereas he would scarcely have omitted to mention such contacts, had they existed, in view of his frequent mentions of information he obtained from Egyptian priests.[28]

That Herodotus could have witnessed Persian daily life and customs among the Persians living in Asia Minor is almost too evident to mention. It must therefore be taken into consideration that part of his information probably derives from personal experience. Since in most cases relevant to the Persian religion he never explicitly distinguishes between what he has seen or what he has heard or read, we are in the dark with regard to his sources on this subject.

Recent years have seen an increasing interest in the role oral traditions play in the *Histories*. Whereas previously, the focus had been much on the comparison of Herodotus' information with what written sources were available, the shift towards the possibility of Herodotus' using oral versions of Persian (and other) history, seems to have a salutary effect on the understanding of the transmission of knowledge in Herodotus' time.[29] The presence of oral traditions has been particularly important for the explanation of, for instance, the accession narrative of Darius (as compared with the official variant of his accession in the inscription in Behistūn),[30] the stories on Cyrus' youth[31] and other greater narratives in the *Histories*, although the presence of oral traditions in some of these is also frequently doubted.[32] In the shorter and non-narrative passages, such as the description of Persian customs in 1.131-140, oral traditions (in their narrative sense) cannot be demonstrated and are in fact unlikely to underlie Herodotus' text.

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[28] On which, cf. Lloyd, *Herodotus. Book II*, vol. I, 89-91.

[29] J.A.S. Evans, 'Oral Tradition in Herodotus', in: Evans, *Herodotus. Explorer of the Past*, 89-146; O. Murray, 'Herodotus and Oral History', *AchHist* II (1987), 93-115; M. Lang, 'Herodotus: Oral History with a Difference', *ProcAmPhilSoc.* 128 (1984), 93-103.

[30] J.M. Balcer, *Herodotus and Bisitun. Problems in Ancient Persian Historiography* (Historia Einzelschrift 49), Stuttgart 1987, *passim*.

[31] G. Binder, *Die Aussetzung des Königskindes Kyros und Romulus* (BKP 10), Meisenheim am Glan, 1964. The nature of Binder's investigations (with which I tend to disagree completely), focusing on *Männerbünde* and related phenomena, is quite different from the other studies mentioned, but it also stresses oral traditions.

[32] H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Herodotus en de Meden. Historiciteit en orale traditie', *Lampas* 20 (1987), 155-167.

b. *The concept* nomos[33]

The concept *nomos*, "custom, tradition, law", so forcefully present throughout the larger ethnographic passages in the *Histories*, is a key term for Greek or specifically Herodotean views on the nature of the different peoples inhabiting the world, Greeks and others. It imposes a structure on the reality of different peoples living together, which not only serves as a defining agent of what Greeks do and think, but also as an explanatory agent to interpret why different peoples have different customs and—specifically in Herodotus—why history takes the courses it does. *Nomos*, moreover, has certain metaphysical qualities. Even though it is true to say that Herodotus does not consider *nomoi* as fully ordained by heaven, but being based on a selective procedure of choices a people—or its ancestors—have made, "*nomoi* possessed authority".[34] Just how great that authority was in Herodotus' mind, is obvious not only from the function of *nomos* as an explaining agent in the course of his book. It is also clear from the fact that he attributes the use of the concept to the Persian king Xerxes (*Hist*. 7.8), who elsewhere is shown to have little respect for *nomoi* in general (7.101-104), as did of course his distant relative Cambyses, whom Herodotus considered to have been mad (esp. 3.27-38).

The most famous passage concerning *nomos* in the *Histories* is 3.38, the fictitious meeting of Greeks and Indians at the court of Darius, during which Darius asks the Greeks, who burn their dead, if they would be willing to eat the bodies of their deceased, and asks the Indians, who eat their dead, if they would be willing to burn the bodies of their deceased, much to the horror of both parties. Herodotus concludes by proving Pindarus right: "*Nomos* is the king of all", a quotation shown to be painfully off the mark in the context of the fragment of Pindarus,[35] but illustrating with great clarity the metaphysical qualities Herodotus attributes to the concept of *nomos*. Those who do not obey the essential requirement of the *nomoi*, that different peoples have different customs which, one way or another, suit them well and should be tolerated, inevitably approach their downfall, as the history of the Persian wars shows.[36]

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[33] On *nomos*, cf. M. Gigante, *NOMOS BASILEUS*, Napoli 1956; M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of Athenian Democracy*, Oxford 1969; S. Humphreys, 'Law, Custom and Culture in Herodotus', *Arethusa* 20 (1987), 211-220; Evans, *Herodotus. Explorer of the Past*, 23-28, supplementing earlier views expressed in 'Despotes Nomos', *Athenaeum* 43 (1968), 142-153.

[34] Evans, *Herodotus. Explorer of the Past*, 24-25, referring a.o. to the story of Gyges and Kandaules, *Hist*. 1.8.

[35] Noticed already by How and Wells, *Commentary*, *ad locum*; for more modern views, cf. the indispensable contributions by Evans, *Herodotus. Explorer of the Past*, 25 with n. 63, and S. Humphreys, 'Law, Custom and Culture', *passim*.

This requirement of the *nomoi* implies an ambiguous neutrality on the part of Herodotus as ethnographer. It is true to say that Herodotus, when describing foreign *nomoi*, quite often passes no other judgment than an expression of amazement just how different these customs are from those of the Greeks. Herodotus' predilection for the miraculous can be noted in his description of the physical geography and architecture of foreign countries as well as in his recording of foreign customs.[37] It is also sometimes suspected that Herodotus uses foreign customs as a device of teaching his audience how to behave, of actually learning from the barbarians.[38] On the other hand, Herodotus also uses *nomoi* he and his fellow Greeks would have considered utterly revolting as a means of indicating depravity or signs of madness (as noted in the examples of Cambyses and Xerxes). There is often more than a trace of Herodotus' personal feelings—of admiration or of rejection—in his description of Greeks and barbarians alike. A good example is the above-mentioned passage 3.38, the debate between Greeks and Indians at the court of Darius. Whereas the Greeks simply "said that they would not do so in any case", the Indians "shouting with loud clamour ordered him to be still." In the sketching of the two reactions, much cultural prejudice can be found on the level of imagining Greek rationality versus barbarian emotionality. In sum, Herodotus shows himself as much shaped by his own background as one would expect, which is not very surprising, but important to notice nonetheless.

c. *Herodotus on religion*

A people's religion, that is its pantheon, sacred buildings and sacrificial rituals, is part and parcel of its *nomoi*. The sometimes elaborate descriptions Herodotus gives of foreign religions are therefore most often found within a larger excursus on the customs of the people Herodotus is about to introduce. With regard to the subject of Herodotus' attitude towards religion in general and foreign religious systems in particular, several subjects of research can be discerned. Herodotus' own attitude towards religion, especially towards religious phenomena such as oracles and the interpretation of dreams, has been researched on the basis of a collection of the relevant data in the *Histories*.[39] For several narrative structures in the *Histories*, the religious motivation lying behind political events is an important part of the literary composition.[40] For the present study, however, Herodotus' attitude towards the religion of non-Greek peoples, is most important,[41] particularly his attitude towards the religion of the Persians.

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[36] Cf. Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 152-155.

[37] Lloyd, *Herodotus. Book II*, vol. I, 141-147.

[38] In the case of the Persians, Herodotus' description of Persian education (1.136), on the rarity of parricide (1.137), and on the ban on lying and making debts (1.138), seem to suit this category. Cf. E. Wolff, 'Perser-Nomoi und Geschichtliches Verstehen', in: W. Marg (ed.), *Herodot. Eine Auswahl aus der neueren Forschung*, 404-411; Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 152-153.

The modern perception of what is part of a religious tradition is considerably at variance with what Herodotus considers to be the religious element in the wider context of a people's *nomoi*. The information Herodotus provides on the funerary practices of the Magi (1.140) today figures prominently in treatments of Herodotus' description of Persian religion. Herodotus himself, however, does not set the practice within a religious context. When he speaks of religion (which, as Burkert has noted, is not a category in Herodotus' vocabulary to begin with) he focuses on two questions: what gods are worshipped and how are they worshipped?[42] This pattern is discernible for the Persians as well as for the Scythians, Egyptians and others.

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[39] For instance R. Crahay, *La littérature oraculaire chez Hérodote*, Paris 1956; P. Frisch, *Die Träume bei Herodot*, Meisenheim am Glan 1968; J. Kirchberg, *Die Funktion der Orakel im Werke Herodots*, Göttingen 1965.

[40] Cf. for instance, L. Huber, *Religiöse und politische Beweggründe des Handelns in der Geschichtsschreibung des Herodot*, diss. Tübingen 1965; B. Shimron, *Politics and Beliefs in Herodotus* (Historia Einzelschrift 58), Stuttgart 1989.

[41] The earliest catalogues of Herodotus' descriptions of foreign religions are I.M. Linforth, 'Greek Gods and Foreign Gods in Herodotus', *UCPCPh* 9 (1926), 1-25, and *id*., 'Named and Unnamed Gods in Herodotus', *ibid*., 201-243; for general treatments, cf. G.C.J. Daniëls, *Religieus-historische studie over Herodotus*, Diss. Nijmegen 1946; G. Lachenaud, *Mythologies, religion et philosophie de l'histoire dans Hérodote*, Paris 1978; W. Burkert, 'Herodot über die Namen der Götter: Polytheismus als historisches Problem', *MH* 42 (1985), 121-132; *id*., 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', in: *Hérodote et les peuples non grecs* (*Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 35 (1988), 1-32 (with discussion on 33-39); Mora, *Religione e religioni*.

[42] Burkert, 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', 4-5.

As a rule, Herodotus' description of foreign religions is contrastive. He compares Greek beliefs and practices with those of foreign peoples, thereby arriving at a description of a foreign religion that must have been informative for his intended audience, but at the same time leaves very many blank spaces for the modern interpreter. Tempting as it is, it is impossible to stretch Herodotus' contrastive approach to the level that wherever he fails to mention a practice in a ritual sequence, this implies that the practice was identical with what the Greeks were used to. This, for instance, is an attractive option for the killing of the sacrificial animal among the Persians (1.132), but it always remains a distinct possibility that Herodotus was simply unaware of how exactly the animal was slaughtered. Arguments *ex silentio* are not valid in Herodotus' description of foreign customs.

Herodotus' descriptions furthermore are comparative. Throughout his descriptions of foreign *nomoi* he is constantly comparing various customs, both with his own background and with the customs of other barbarians. This happens both on the level of customs, and on the level of gods. The divinities are—with some notable exceptions—generally interpreted in Greek categories. Thus, Herodotus gives many examples of Oriental Aphrodites or Celestial Goddesses (Ouranie), including (presumably) Egyptian Hathor, Syrian Astarte and Arabian Alilat. Greek Aphrodite, moreover, is absent from the *Histories* (although she may occur in a dream in *Histories* 1.181). These *interpretationes graecae* pervade the *Histories*, often leaving it to the modern interpreter to guess which divinity is meant. Although matters are sometimes different with regard to Egypt, Herodotus often does not give the indigenous names of the divinities, but interprets them along the lines of his personal conception of the religion of his audience. The same is true for his descriptions of rituals and other customs. A close comparison with Greek theology and ritual, therefore, is constantly needed to appreciate Herodotus' description of the religious systems of other peoples.

Herodotus' descriptions, finally, are sometimes thought to betray his personal feelings on religious subjects. Rarely does Herodotus say he admires something, or that he approves or disapproves of a custom.[43] Nevertheless, admiration and (dis)approval are quite commonly indicated by modern commentators.

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[43] But cf. the examples given by Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 152.

It is always difficult to point exactly to words where Herodotus shows his admiration and where he does not. Selective representation of customs could possibly be an indicator, but this would require a minimum knowledge of what Herodotus actually knew, and what he chose to leave out of the discussion. This type of knowledge is of necessity unavailable, and can at most be recovered by asking the question why, for instance, Herodotus claims that the Persians do not use libations as part of their sacrifice, but are in fact represented as making libations to appease a storm.[44]

d. *Approaching Herodotus,* Historiae *1.131-132*[45]

There appears to be general agreement on the fact that what Herodotus records in 1.131-132, is a description of the Persian religion as it was in his times, that is roughly in the middle of the fifth century BCE.[46] By that time, the Greeks had been in (undesired) direct contact with the Persians for approximately more than a century, and Persians and Greeks had coexisted, for instance in Asia Minor. Herodotus himself, moreover, frequently relates stories of contact between Persians and Greeks, and indicates that he himself communicated with Persians. It is impossible to give precise numbers of the Persian settlers in Asia Minor and other parts of the Persian Empire, but there must have been many, both those connected with administration and pacification, and former soldiers who received plots of land in reward for their military activities.[47] These settlers are found with a particular density in certain parts of Lydia (the Hyrcanian plain, Hiera Kome etc.), and the survival of Iranian cults in those parts of Lydia seems to suggest that the original communities of Persians brought with them elements of their cult and members of their priesthood.

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[44] The question of selectiveness and exclusion is admirably treated and catalogued by Lateiner, *Historical Method*, 59-75.

[45] Earlier commentaries on (parts of) *Histories* 1.131-132 are: Windischmann, *ZorStud*, 271-273; Moulton, *EZ*, 391-398; Clemen, 'Herodot als Zeuge für den Mazdaismus', *ARW* 16 (1913), 101-121; *id.*, *Nachrichten*, 96-124; Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 22-49; Boyce, *HZ* II, 179-183; M.J. Edwards, 'Herodotus and Mithras: *Histories* I.131', *AJP* 111 (1990), 1-4; Th. Corsten, 'Herodot I 131 und die Einführung des Anahita-Kultes in Lydien', *IrAnt* 26 (1991), 163-180.

[46] The connection H. Funke, 'Götterbild', *RAC* XI (1981), 659-828, col. 764, sees between *Histories* 1.131 and the "Indo-iranische Einheitsperiode" (2000 BCE??), is probably based on a misunderstanding of Benveniste's theory that the religion described by Herodotus resembles the proto-Indo-Iranian religion *much more* than Zoroastrianism.

[47] For the problems connected with assessing the Persian impact on Asia Minor, cf. J.M. Balcer, *Sparda by the Bitter Sea: Imperial Interaction in Western Anatolia* (Brown Judaic Studies 52), Chico 1984. For attempts at assessing the Persian population, cf. N.V. Sekunda, 'Achaemenid Colonization in Lydia', *REAnc* 87 (1985), 7-29; *id.*, 'Persian Settlement in Hellespontine Phrygia', *AchHist* III

Herodotus himself mentions the presence of Magi in the military campaigns of the Persian king Xerxes (7.114; 7.191). Later authors, such as Xenophon, have also noticed that the Persian priests accompanied the army.[48] In view of the open air worship of the Persians, noted by Herodotus as well as by later authors,[49] it is certainly possible that Herodotus witnessed Persians conducting their rituals. In view of his authoritative *I know* at the beginning of the Persian *nomoi* (1.131), however, it seems unimaginable that he would just have recorded what he witnessed (without asking for an explanation), and indeed much of the information he provides gives the impression of being based on answers concerning matters that were of typical interest to Herodotus: Who are the gods? How are they imagined to be? What is the cultic setting of religion and ritual? How are sacrifices conducted? What happens with the meat of the animal?

Thus, there are already two layers of information: Herodotus' *Vorverständnis* of religious practices and interest in comparable practices among foreign peoples, and the actual information he personally gathered. In view of the comparative scarcity of information Herodotus offers, it is impossible to say whether he had used written sources on the Persian religion, and whether parts of his information stem from common perceptions of Persian religion current among the Greeks. The best we can guess, therefore, is that at the basis of Herodotus' description of the religion of the Persians lies a combination of information he gained from Greeks or Persians, supplemented by things he knew from personal observation, matters he witnessed and heard among the Persian settlers.

To compare Herodotus' information with the Iranian materials is a necessary step towards an interpretation of the text. The

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(1988), 175-195; *id.*, 'Achaemenid Settlement in Caria, Lycia and Greater Phrygia', *AchHist* VI (1991), 83-143; M.-F. Baslez, 'Présence et traditions iraniennes dans les cités de l'Egée', *REAnc* 87 (1985), 137-155.

[48] This appears to be a theme in the Classical reports. Cf., for instance, Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 7.5.57; 8.1.23; Curtius Rufus 3.3.8-10; Procopius, *De Bello Persico*, 1.3.18-19 etc.

[49] Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 5.65.1, quoting Dino of Colophon.

question arises, however, which Iranian materials are relevant as sources of comparison. The information that can be culled from the Achaemenian inscriptions is very meagre and, in view of the possible differences between the religious practices of kings and commoners, sometimes even irrelevant. The main source of comparison is the Avesta, parts of which at least predate Herodotus' information considerably. There are some problems connected with this comparison. It is sufficiently clear that the description Herodotus gives of the religion of the Persians, describes this religion in a state which is unknown from most other sources: the period of the Iranian faith before the introduction of cult statues and temples, that is, before the emergence of the cult of fire as a central element of religious observance. This makes the references from the Pahlavi books—steeped in the fire-cult as the most important expression of Zoroastrianism—often irrelevant. The Avestan texts are far more appropriate as a source of comparison, because they equally predate the introduction of fire-temples. They are, however, not very descriptive and little relevant information can be derived from the Avesta.[50] The Avestan texts that are decidedly of importance are the formulaic descriptions of sacrifices performed by heroes, as can be found in most Yašts. Apart from that, certain portions of the *Nērangestān* are of importance and equally several shorter references to sacrifice in other parts of the Avesta.

The Avesta, however, is a priestly text and the rituals Herodotus describes have been consistently interpreted as lay rituals, only requiring the presence of a priest for the chanting of the proper texts. It may therefore be relevant to use information from contemporary Zoroastrian practices, as recorded by Boyce in the Zoroastrian villages of the Yazd plain.[51] The Parsi Zoroastrian community has given up the practice of animal sacrifice altogether, and the much better documented practices of the Parsi Zoroastrians can therefore not be used. The use of 20th-century materials for the interpretation of a text from the 5th century BCE may be difficult to accept for some but, as was noted throughout chapter 2, there are good reasons for using these data.[52]

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[50] For the theories and discussions on the emergence of the cult of fire among the Zoroastrians, cf. ch. 4.5.1.

[51] Boyce, *Stronghold, passim*.

[52] For a recent example, cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 127-128. The use of con-

The approach taken towards *Historiae* 1.131-132, then, consists of isolating pieces of information Herodotus provides, and trying to relate these pieces of information, first of all to texts and materials from Achaemenian Iran, then to the Avesta and the later Zoroastrian tradition (esp. the lay traditions). By keeping a keen awareness of Herodotus' Greek religious and cultural heritage, and his handling of information derived from his sources, we shall try to arrive at a set of correspondences and divergences that will be as complete as possible. By combining the isolated pieces of information, evidence may be procured with regard to the religious traditions of the ancient Persians.

2. *Translation*

1.131 I know that the Persians have these customs: it is not their custom to erect statues, temples and altars, but they even make fun of those who do, because—as it seems to me—they have not considered the gods to be of human form, as do the Greeks. But it is their custom to go up to the highest summits of the mountains and sacrifice to Zeus, calling the entire vault of heaven Zeus. And they sacrifice to the sun and the moon and the earth and fire and water and the winds. Only to these, now, they have sacrificed from the beginning, but they have learnt, from the Assyrians and the Arabians, to sacrifice also to Ouraniē; the Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta, the Arabians Alilat and the Persians Mitra.

1.132 And the sacrifice among the Persians for the gods mentioned above consists of the following: they do not make altars nor light a fire when they want to sacrifice; they do not use a libation, nor a flute, wreaths, or grains of wheat. But when one of them wants to sacrifice to any of these (gods), he leads the animal to a pure place and calls upon the god, having adorned his tiara with a wreath, usually of myrtle. He who performs the sacrifice may not ask for good things for his own interest only, but he prays for good to befall to all the Persians and to the king; for he himself is among all the Persians. Then, when he has cut the victim to pieces and seethed the pieces of meat, he spreads out

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temporary materials is by no means exclusive for Herodotus' description of the Persians. Cf., for instance, G. Camps, 'Pour une lecture naïve d'Hérodote. Les récits libyens (IV, 168-199)', *Storia della Storiografia* 7 (1985), 38-59.

very tender grass, usually trefoil, and places the pieces of meat on it. And when he has arranged it, a Magus who stands close by sings a theogony—such do they say the invocation is; for without a Magus it is not their custom to sacrifice. After a little while in waiting, the sacrificer takes away the pieces of meat and uses them as he thinks best.

3. *Commentary*

I know that the Persians have these customs: it is not their custom to erect statues, temples and altars, but they even make fun of those who do, because—as it seems to me—they have not considered the gods to be of human form, as do the Greeks.

The first Herodotean statement with regard to the religion of the Persians, is immediately one which seems to be contradicted by other sources, who do speak of the use of cult statues among the Persians.[53] The most important reference to the introduction of cult statues is the fragment from Berossos' *Babyloniaca*[54] in Clement of Alexandria *Protrepticus* 5.65.3, where the introduction of cult statues (exclusively devoted to the cult of Anāhitā) is attributed to Artaxerxes II, son of Darius II Ochos (r. 404-359).[55] He is said to have erected statues of Aphrodite Anaïtis throughout the Persian empire, *inter alia* in Sardis.[56] Herodotus was long dead before Artaxerxes II acceded to the throne, so Berossos' information does not prove Herodotus wrong. Things are different for the much-discussed inscription of the *hyparch* of Lydia Droaphernes son of Barakes, in which a statue of a divinity is mentioned, whom some scholars have supposed to be Ahura

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[53] Cf. Weißbach's firm statement: 'Es wird hohe Zeit mit der Behauptung des Vaters der Geschichte, daß die Perser keine Bilder, Tempel und Altäre zu erregen pflegten, sondern die, so das taten, Toren schalten, endlich einmal aufzuräumen', in his review of A.V.W. Jackson's *Persia Past and Present*, *ZDMG* 121 (1907), 717-722, p. 721.

[54] For Berossos, cf. P. Schnabel, *Berossos und die babylonisch-hellenistische Literatur*, Berlin 1923 (repr. Hildesheim 1968); S.M. Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, Malibu 1978.

[55] Contrary to what Burstein (see the preceding note) *ad locum* and others have pointed out, the translation of Berossos' Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ Δαρείου τοῦ Ὤχου as "Artaxerxes, son of Darius, who is known as Ōchos" is historically correct if the Ōchos refers to Darius II (also known as *Nothos*), the father of Artaxerxes II, who himself was nicknamed Mnemon.

[56] Cf. ch. 4.3. Boyce, *HZ* II, 201-204, argues that it was Artaxerxes' father, Darius II, who was at the basis of the promotion of Anahita's cult. This, however, does not change the argument with regard to Herodotus.

Mazdā.[57] This inscription, whatever its interpretation, is attributed to the 39th year of Artaxerxes and therefore can be dated either in 427-426 BCE (the 39th year of Artaxerxes I) or in 366-365 BCE (the 39th year of Artaxerxes II). If the inscription is from the reign of Artaxerxes I and if the statue was indeed one of Ahura Mazdā, this could mean that the introduction of cult statues was somehow contemporary with Herodotus, albeit in his very late years. The problem of the attribution to Artaxerxes I or Artaxerxes II appears to be insuperable at present, but it is extremely unlikely that the inscription indeed refers to Ahura Mazdā, especially in view of the fact that there is no solid evidence for the existence of a statue cult of Ahura Mazdā anywhere or in any period, apart from some Armenian passages not predating the 5th century CE. Combining all the evidence we have, it seems most likely that the introduction of a statue cult of Anaïtis was an innovation of the Persian religion that was personally instigated by Artaxerxes II, and therefore took place after Herodotus wrote down his interpretation of the Persian religion which, at that time, was distinctly aniconic.

What has been said about Iranian statue-cult can also be applied to temple-cult. Iranian temples (fire-temples in this case) are possibly known from the relevant period, mainly from Iran itself,[58] but there is no consensus whatsoever on the exact or even the approximate date of the large-scale introduction of Iranian temples. In Boyce's view, the Zoroastrian temple cult of fire originated in response to the introduction of statues and temples in the Iranian religions connected with the worship of Anāhitā.[59] Before that period, that is roughly during the reign of Darius II and Artaxerxes II, the existence of fire-temples cannot be expected. It may also be significant that even later Greek authors rarely call a Zoroastrian fire-temple a temple (*naos*), presumably because a *naos* without a cult statue was unimaginable.[60] Either way, Herodotus' remark on the absence of temples is correct.

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[57] The inscription was published by L. Robert, 'Une nouvelle inscription grecque de Sardes: règlement de l'autorité perse relatif à un culte de Zeus', *CRAI* 1975, 306-30. Scholars who agree with the interpretation of Zeus as Ahura Mazdā include Boyce, *HZ* II, 255-7; Boyce & Grenet, *HZ* III, 205; P. Briant, 'Les iraniens d'Asie Mineure après la chute de l'empire Achéménide', *DHA* 11 (1985), 167-95, p. 189, n. 13; H.W. Pleket, 'Religious History as the History of Mentality', in H.S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 2), Leiden 1981, 152-92, p. 160; F. Sokolowski, 'Ta enpura: on the Mysteries in the Lydian and Phrygian Cults', *ZPE* 34 (1979), 65-69; J. Wiesehöfer, rev. of P. Frei & K. Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (cf. below), *Gnomon* 57 (1985), 565-567. Those who have argued against it include F. Gschnitzer, 'Eine persische Kultstiftung und die "Sippengötter" Vorderasiens', in: W. Meid & H. Trenkwalder (eds.), *Im Bannkreis des alten Orients* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft 24), Innsbruck 1986, 45-54; P. Frei, 'Zentralgewalt und Lokalautonomie im Achämenidenreich', in: P. Frei & K. Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (OBO 55), Freiburg-Göttingen 1984, 7-43, pp. 20-21 with nn. 47-56 on pp. 34-35 and, decisively, M.-L. Chaumont, 'Un nouveau gouverneur de Sardes à l'époque achéménide d'après une inscription récemment découverte', *Syria* 67 (1990), 579-608.

[58] Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, 473-475.

The use of the word "altar" for the base on which the fire-vase is placed, as represented on Achaemenian works of art,[61] sometimes appears to have influenced the understanding of what Herodotus actually says here. According to Herodotus, the Persians have no *bōmos*. This refers to the sacrificial altar, carrying the ritual fire, the structure on which the portions sacrificed to the gods are placed and burnt, in order to please the god or goddess addressed. As such, it was known to the Greeks.[62] That the Iranians do not know of such an altar seems to be correct, in view of the fact that nothing remotely resembling the *bōmos* has been found so far. It is moreover consistent with Herodotus' reference to the use of a mound of grass to place the pieces of meat on (1.132).

The phrase following the information on the absence of temples, statues and altars in the religion of the Persians, is telling in many respects. First of all, Herodotus clearly indicates that what follows is his own interpretation, not information he obtained from Persian or other informants. His interpretation is wrong. To Herodotus, having been informed that there were no statues in the religion he describes, it must have seemed likely that therefore the gods were not conceived of as being human in form. In the *Histories* the Iranian peoples (Persians and Scythians) are the only peoples not to make cult statues. Herodotus obviously found this worthy of notice, and it caused him to speculate on the reasons for the absence of cult statues. It has been suggested, moreover, that contemporary religious discussions among the Greeks, as exemplified in the work of Xenophanes of Colophon, are also part of the background to this passage. Xenophanes criticised the notion of anthropomorphic divinities and the worship of cult statues, suggesting more fitting ways of worshipping the One. One of these was the worship of the manifestation of the divine in the vault of heaven. This is exactly what Herodotus attributes to the Persians.[63]

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[59] M. Boyce, 'On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire', *JAOS* 95 (1975), 454-465; Y. Yamamoto, 'The Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire in Archaeology and Literature', *Orient* 15 (1979), 19-53 (part I); *Orient* 17 (1981), 67-104 (part II); for an altogether different view, S. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, *passim*.

[60] Cf. Burkert, *GR*, 88: "The temple is the dwelling place, *naos*, of the deity; it houses the anthropomorphic cult image. The beginnings of temple building therefore overlap with the history of the development of the images of the gods."

[61] Cf., in addition to the articles of Boyce and Yamamoto mentioned above, J. Houtkamp, 'Fire Altars of the Achaemenid Period', in: Kellens (ed.), *La religion iranienne*, 23-48.

[62] Cf. Burkert, *GR*, 87-88.

If Herodotus really assumed that the Persians did not consider their gods to be in the likeness of man,[64] he was clearly mistaken. Both in the Avesta, and in the artistic representations in Achaemenian art,[65] the divinities clearly are thought of as having a human form. As has often been stressed, the mere use of epithets as *sruṯ.gaoša-*, "having a listening ear", or *druuō.cašman-*, "having sound eyes", suggests an anthropomorphic imagery and the description of Anāhitā (Yt. 5.126-129) as a young girl makes this even more certain.[66] Human affects and activities are widely ascribed to the Zoroastrian divinities, and there is no reason to suggest that this anthropomorphic conception of the divinities is a late or local development. An anthropomorphic conception of the gods obviously does not assume or imply the existence or development of cult statues, as the Hebrew Bible sufficiently shows.

It has been argued by many that this passage—as well as the introductory clause of 1.132—tells us more about the religion of the Greeks than about that of the Persians. The information can be read as a catalogue of the essential elements of Greek cults: these consist of temples with altars and statues. The combination of temple, altar and statue is a fixed combination in the *Histories*. It can be found in Herodotus' description of the religion of the Egyptians (2.4, where it is argued that the Egyptians were the first to introduce these practices), the Scythians (4.57, in a wording very comparable to 1.131) and in his description of the temple of Zeus-Marduk in Babylon (1.183).

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[63] For Xenophanes, cf. Burkert, *GR*, 308-310; for the connection between *Histories* 1.131 and Xenophanes, Burkert, *GR*, 313 with n. 18 on p. 467, and 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', 19-22.

[64] For the word Herodotus uses to express this idea (ἀνθρωποφυής, "of human nature"), cf. Moulton, *EZ*, 391.

[65] The gods were not regularly represented in works of art, but at least the figure in the winged disk—prominent in many pieces of Achaemenian art—represents a divine figure, be it Ahura Mazda (thus, among many others, P. Lecoq, 'Un problème de religion Achéménide: Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?', *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin Oblata* (Acta Iranica 23), 1984, 301-326) or divine glory (thus, among many others, A.Sh. Shahbazi, 'An Achaemenid Symbol II: Farnah "(God given) Fortune" symbolised', *AMI* 13 (1980), 119-147).

[66] R. Hauschild, 'Der Mantel der Anāhitā (Yt. 5.129)—abermaliger Versuch einer Interpretation', *MIO* 11 (1965), 27-54; H. Schmeja, 'Das Bild der Göttin. Zu Yašt 5,126 und Parallelstellen', in W. Meid & H. Trenkwalder (eds.), *Im Bannkreis des alten Orients* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft 24), Innsbruck 1986, 213-221. For a discussion, cf. ch. 4.1.3.

The most telling statement in this respect is the short description of the mysterious *Gelōnes*, related to the Scythian *Boudinoi*, but Greek in origin. Some of them—according to Herodotus—still speak Greek, some Scythian. On their cults Herodotus says (4.108): "And their houses and sanctuaries (ἱρά) are made of wood. For there are there sanctuaries of Greek gods, constructed in a Greek manner: with statues, altars and wooden temples and they dedicate a biannual feast to Dionysus and keep the Bacchic feasts." From this passage Herodotus' own conception of Greek cults may be read with certainty: temple—statue—altar.

But it is their custom to go up to the highest summits of the mountains and sacrifice to Zeus, calling the entire vault of heaven Zeus.

The first Persian god Herodotus introduces in his Histories, is Zeus, undoubtedly an *interpretatio graeca* of Iranian Ahura Mazdā. Elsewhere in the *Histories* this Persian Zeus also occurs. In two passages mention is made of the sacred chariot of Zeus, which was drawn by ten horses (*Histories* 7.40; 8.115). This usage shows even more clearly that Persian Zeus is indeed Ahura Mazdā, for the practice was taken over from the Babylonians, who used a chariot with the statue of their national god, Aššur, in their processions.[67] The Iranian drawn chariot in the description of Herodotus and others is empty, thus providing another indication of the general absence of statues or cult images in the religion of the Persians.

That the Persians go up to "the highest summits of the mountains" in order to make their offerings to Zeus has often been doubted, because this would seem impractical. Strabo gives comparable information, but uses the more realistic phrase "in a high place".[68] Xenophon, however, who is one of the few Greek authors who certainly witnessed Persian daily life, makes a similar statement, describing a sacrifice Cyrus performs "for Ancestral Zeus and the Sun and the other gods, on the highest peaks, as the Persians sacrifice".[69] The Avesta in particular seems to endorse Herodotus' information, for there the ideal worship of the gods is conducted "on the highest height, on Harā the high" (*barəzište paiti barəzahi haraiθiiō paiti barəzaiiå*, Y. 57.19 = Yt. 10.88 etc.). Similarly, in Yt. 5 several heroes are said to have offered to this goddess on mountains (Yt. 5.21; 25), or in reverse, the sacrifices offered by evil men are offered under the ground, in a cave (Yt. 5.41). In these idealised descriptions of sacrifice, it is clear that high is good and low is bad. Zoroastrian shrines and temples can still be found on hills and mountains, and the practice of going up a mountain for certain rituals is still upheld by the Zoroastrians of Iran.[70] Worship on hilltops or mountains is thus not only an observable fact, but also the standard representation of where rituals are (or ought to be) performed.

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[67] Cf., with references, *HZ* II, 36.

In some translations of the passage, there is a causal link between the worship on the highest summits and the fact that the Persians call the vault of heaven Zeus. This link appears to be natural, but it is not explicit in the Greek text. There is no reason to assume that the Persians called the entire vault of heaven Zeus (Ahura Mazdā). There is a divinity associated with the vault of heaven, Thwāša (Av. *θβāṣ̌a-*), the "Firmament", mentioned in connection with Mithra (Yt. 10.66) and in some other passages, but he remains a colourless god who only rose to prominence in some cosmogonical speculations.[71]

Ahura Mazdā as the supreme lord is associated fairly naturally with the firmament. His active principle, the Bounteous Spirit (Av. *spəṇta- mańiiu*) is said by Zarathustra to be clad in hardest stone (*xraoždištəṇg asənō vastē*, Y. 30.5), just as Ahura Mazdā himself wears the firmament as a garment in Yt. 13.3.[72] It is presumably this imagery which lies at the basis of Herodotus' contention that the Persians call the entire vault of heaven Zeus.[73]

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[68] *Geography* 15.3.13.

[69] Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.7.3.

[70] The earlier views that the "high-places" found in Susa and Elymais are Zoroastrian cult centres, is exhaustively discussed, and rejected, by Grenet in *HZ* III, 35-48. For the modern pilgrimages, cf. Boyce, *Stronghold*, 247-249.

[71] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 89, with references; Gray, *Foundations*, 162.

[72] There is a prolonged discussion on the nature of Spenta Mainyu. Some scholars have argued for a separate existence of this divinity, whereas others—

The passage was not always understood thus, however. Moulton already preferred to find in this passage a reference to the Indo-European sky-god *Dyauš, who is palpably absent from Iranian religions.[74] Bartholomae gave the question an extensive treatment,[75] starting from a gloss found in Hesychius: Δῖαν· μεγάλην ἦ ἔνδοξον· τὸν οὐϱανὸν. Πέϱσαι ("Dia(n): great (fem.) or honourable; the sky. Persians"). Bartholomae used this gloss to interpret the single occurrence of the word *diiau-* in Avestan. It is much more likely, however, that Hesychius, or the lexicographer he relied upon, interpreted Herodotus' phrase "calling the entire vault of heaven Zeus (Δία)" as "calling the entire vault of heaven Δῖα" and supplemented this accusative with the final -n- that made it regular in Greek. This entry in Hesychius' Lexicon should therefore not be given too much weight. The Indo-European *Dyauš remains absent from Iran.

If we try to relate the information in this passage to Iranian materials, the only genuine source available is the Avesta. In the OP inscriptions the sky is frequently mentioned, but only as the creation of Auramazdā. The imagery in the passage does to some extent recall Avestan poetic imagery. Alternatively, one could suggest that the entire identification of Ahura Mazdā with the vault of heaven is Herodotus' conclusion, based on the information that the Persians pray on a mountain top to Ahura Mazdā.

And they sacrifice to the sun and the moon and the earth and fire and water and the winds.

In the very comparable paraphrase of the Persian religion in Strabo's *Geography* (discussed in ch. 3.2), Strabo introduces

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especially Boyce—maintain that he is in fact the same as Ahura Mazdā. For a survey of these opinions, cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 71 and 81 with nn. 50 and 54. The question has been reopened by P.G. Kreyenbroek, who—with a wealth of Avestan arguments—argues that Spenta Mainyu and Ahura Mazdā originally were two separate beings, but that eventually Spenta Mainyu was absorbed into the concept of Ahura Mazdā: 'On Spenta Mainyu's role', *passim*.

[73] For Indian parallels of this imagery, cf. A. Parpola, *The Sky-Garment. A Study of the Harappan Religion and its Relation to the Mesopotamian and Later Indian Religions* (Studia Orientalia 57), Helsinki 1985, 37-43 and 140-142.

[74] *EZ*, 391-393. The word *diiau-*, "heaven" occurs once, in Yt. 3.13; it has been suggested that it is here the *daevic* term for heaven: Kellens, *Noms-racines*, 402.

[75] C. Bartholomae, *Zum altiranischen Wörterbuch. Nacharbeiten und Vorarbeiten* (IF Beih. 19), Strassburg 1906, 172-175 (to *AIrWb.*, 761-762, s.v. ^{2}*dyav-*).

Mithra in the list of Persian gods. He writes: "And they also honour the Sun—whom they call Mithra—and the moon and Aphrodite and fire and earth and the winds and water."[76] It is a curious fact that Herodotus here fails to mention Mithra, whereas he wrongly mentions Mithra in the following passage. Mithra was a prominent god in the religion of the Persians and Herodotus himself knew some Persians who received names honouring him (although he may not have understood these names, on which he gives curious information in 1.139).[77] The absence of Mithra from Herodotus' description of the Persian pantheon may have been caused by an early identification of this divinity with the sun in Western Iran.[78] There is, however, another solar divinity in the Iranian pantheon. He is called Hvar (Av. *huuar- xšaēta-*, the "radiant sun")[79] and is frequently mentioned in the Younger Avesta. The sixth Yašt is dedicated to him, as well as the first Niyāyišn. His name is also found in personal names from the Persepolis tablets.[80] The eleventh day of the month is dedicated to the Sun. The sun, being the most important luminary, played an important role in Iranian devotional life. Prayers were said facing the sun (or another source of fire) and the sun also had a chariot or horses dedicated to him (although this may represent a development that took place after Herodotus). In view of the cultic importance of the sun in Zoroastrian devotional life, it is presumably to Hvar that Herodotus refers.

The moon was also a prominent divinity in the ancient Iranian pantheon. The Iranian god of the moon is simply called *Māh*, "moon" and is male.[81] Māh also has his own Yašt (Yt. 7) and his own Nīyāyišn (*Ny*. 3). The twelfth day of the month is dedicated to Māh. Personal names constructed with the name of Māh from the relevant period are rare; in the Elamite onomasticon so far only one possible instance has been found,[82] and in the many Iranian names found in Greek literature, there are only uncertain attestations (*Maidatēs* and *Gōsithrēs*, an Achaemenian carrying the name of the moon's exclusive epithet *gao.ciθra-*, "containing the seed of the bull").[83] There is also an uncertain attestation in Aramaic.[84]

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[76] *Geography* 15.3.13.

[77] Partly explained by Gershevitch, 'The Old Persian Lisp', 133.

[78] For the date and process of this identification, cf. ch. 4.1.4.

[79] Whence MP *xwaršēd*; NP *xoršīd*; cf. Gray, *Foundations*, 85-87.

[80] Mayrhofer, *On.Pers*. 8.1718, 8.971.

[81] Gray, *Foundations*, 87-89.

[82] Mayrhofer, *On.Pers*. 8.908.

There are two separate divinities connected with the earth, the goddess *Zam* (Av. *zəm-*, "earth")[85] and the female Amesha Spenta *Spentā Ārmaiti*.[86] It is most likely, that in a list such as that given by Herodotus, the divinity referred to is Zam, the Earth, because she appears in similar lists in the Avesta in the same manner. The goddess Zam[87] is a colourless figure in the Avesta, probably because she was overshadowed by the important Ārmaiti and because her functions are clear to everyone on the basis of her name alone. The twenty-eighth day of the month and the nineteenth Yašt are dedicated to her, although she is hardly mentioned in Yt. 19, which actually honours the divine Glory (Khvarenah).[88] Personal names with Zam are not attested for the relevant period.

That the Persians worshipped fire is one of the most frequently mentioned aspects in all foreign references to Iranian religions, from Herodotus to the present day. As was the case with the sun and with the earth, there are two divinities closely associated with fire, Ātar (Av. *ātar-*, "fire") and Aša Vahišta. Aša Vahišta, guardian of fire, is one the Amesha Spentas and probably not the divinity meant in this catalogue of nature phenomena. Ātar is an important divinity in his own right, "the son of Ahura Mazdā." The ninth day of the month and the ninth month of the year are dedicated to Ātar, as is the *Ātaš-Niyāyišn* (Ny. 5). Ātar is not honoured with a Yašt of his own, but—just as fire is said to pervade the entire creation—he is omnipresent throughout these hymns. There are very many personal names with the element Ātar from the Achaemenian period[89] and fire is the central icon of every

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[83] Pseudo-Lucian, *Macrobii* 15.

[84] R.A. Bowman, *Aramaic Ritual Texts from Persepolis*, Chicago 1970, 14.4 (*mhdt*).

[85] Kellens, *Noms-racines*, 395-399.

[86] As was argued long ago, the Khotanese word *śśandrāmata-*, used as translation of the Buddhist goddess Śri, is the Khotanese development of the name Spenta Ārmaiti: H.W. Bailey, 'Saka *śśandrāmata*', in: G. Wiessner (ed.), *Festschrift für Wilhelm Eilers*, Wiesbaden 1967, 136-143. It is, however, practically impossible to draw any religious historical conclusions from these words. Cf. H.W. Bailey, *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan*, Delmar 1982, 48-49; M. Boyce, *HZ* I, 78 with nn. 382-383; *ead.*, review of Bailey, *Culture of the Sakas*, *JRAS* 1983, 305-306.

[87] Gray, *Foundations*, 172.

[88] Cf. Hintze, *Zamyād-Yašt*, 45-49.

[89] Mayrhofer, *On. Pers.* 8.491-493; 8.496-503.

Iranian ritual. Herodotus himself knew of the importance of fire among the Persians (*Histories* 3.16), even though he observes that the Persians do not make a fire when they prepare their sacrifices (*Histories* 1.132, to be discussed below).

There are many divinities associated with water in the Iranian pantheon. The most popular of these in later times was Anāhitā, who was a river-goddess in origin, but absorbed many other functions in Western Iran. The most important watergod in the Avesta is Ap ąm Napāt, the "Son of the Waters", later known as "the exalted god" (*Burz yazad*).[90] Apart from Anāhitā and Apąm Napāt, there is a collective group of "Waters", the Āpas, who are also called Ahurānis (women connected with Ahura).[91] The Zoroastrian guardian of water is the Amesha Spenta Haurvatāt and there are a multitude of individual stream and river gods.[92] The prominence of water in the Iranian cults cannot be better illustrated. Some of the main threats to the world of the righteous are the suspension of Gatha-recitation and of the worship of the waters (Vd. 18.9). It is pointless to try and find out the divinity meant by Herodotus' water, because he probably does not indicate a single divinity, but merely stresses the fact that sacrifices were made to water. The situation is similar in the entire Zoroastrian tradition, where a hymn (Yt. 5), a Niyāyišn (Ny. 4), the tenth day and the eighth month are dedicated to the waters or to water. The libation to water (*āb-zōhr*) was one of the main rituals of ancient Zoroastrianism and Herodotus himself was very much aware of the importance of water for the Persians and their efforts to keep impurity away from streams and other sources of living water (*Histories* 1.138).

There are also two important divinities connected with the winds, Vāyu (Av. *vāiiu-*, "air") and Vāta (Av. *vāta-*, "wind"). Vayu is a complex and ambiguous divinity, who is closely associated with the air and with the "void" between the powers of good and evil.[93] The divinity Vāta is the personification of the wind or the winds. The twenty-second day of the month is dedicated to him and many personal names attest to his importance.[94] Vayu is honoured with Yt. 15 (inscribed to Rāman), but is not honoured in the calendar. Personal names constructed with his name are unknown from the relevant period. In the *Histories* Herodotus has recorded a special sacrifice to the winds (7.191) in a context which seems entirely appropriate, to appease a storm that threatened the military operations.

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[90] *HZ* I, 40-52.

[91] They are the Zoroastrian nymphs: cf. H. Humbach, 'Die aramäischen Nymphen von Xanthos', *Die Sprache* 27 (1981), 30-32.

[92] Particularly well known is the Oxus, whose temple has been excavated in Takht-i Sangin: cf. P. Bernard, 'Le temple du dieu Oxus à Takht-i Sangin en Bactriane: temple du feu ou pas?', *StIr* 23 (1994), 81-121, with references.

[93] Many materials can be found in S. Wikander, *Vayu I, passim*; Widengren, *Hochgottglaube*, 188-230. On the general theories underlying these works, cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 16-18.

The most interesting aspect of this catalogue lies not in its constituent parts, the worship of the deities mentioned separately, but in the combination. The *Yasna*, the liturgy of the daily ritual, almost begins with a sentence closely resembling Herodotus' list: "I dedicate, I perform (the ritual) for these places and districts and pastures and homes and water-places, and to the waters and the earth(s) and the plants and to this earth and that heaven and to the righteous wind, to the stars, the moon, the sun and the boundless endless lights and all the male and female righteous creatures of the Bounteous Spirit, the lords of Righteousness" (Y. 1.16).[95] The importance of the individual divinities has been indicated above; the importance of the combination is shown by this passage from the *Yasna*. The gods mentioned in Herodotus are the standard collection of nature divinities honoured throughout the Zoroastrian tradition (for which, cf. ch. 4.1.6). Herodotus claims that these are the only gods, even though he includes in the following sentence Aphrodite and refers to a cult of Heroes later in the *Histories* (7.43). The conclusion that the passage shows that the religion of the Persians in Herodotus' time was "the primitive form of the Iranian religion, thoroughly impregnated with polytheism and paying homage to the deified forces of nature,"[96] reflects outdated categorisations of the development of Iranian religions that are not at all based on the texts. The suggestion by Boyce, that the passage in Herodotus "seems a very fair attempt by a Greek gentleman to render the Zoroastrian doctrine of Ahuramazda and the Ameša Spentas, immanent in their natural 'creations',"[97] also seems considerably off the mark. Of the creations of the Amesha Spentas (man, fire, earth, water, cattle, stone (sky) and plants) no less than four are absent from the list (man, cattle, stone, plants).

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[94] Mayrhofer, On.Pers. 8.911-912 and, for instance, the Greek name Αὐτοφραδάτης, for which cf. Gershevitch, 'Approaches to Zoroaster's Gathas', 29, n. 33.

[95] *niuuaēδaiiemi haṇkāraiiemi åŋhąm asaŋhąmca š́ōiθranąmca gaoiiaoitinąmca maēθananąmca auuō.x^{v}arənanąmca apąmca zəmąmca uruuaranąmca aiŋ́hâsca zəmō auuaiŋ́heca asnō vātaheca aṣ̌aonō strąm måŋhō hūrō anaγranąm raocaŋhąm x^{v}aδātanąm vīspanąmca spəṇtahe mańiiəuš dāmanąm aṣ̌aonąm aṣ̌aoninąmca aṣ̌ahe raθβąm.*

[96] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 29-30.

Only to these, now, they have sacrificed from the beginning, but they have learnt, from the Assyrians and the Arabians, to sacrifice also to Ouraniē; the Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta, the Arabians Alilat and the Persians Mitra.

Having given a catalogue of the divinities who received regular offerings, Herodotus introduces one final goddess who is worshipped by the Persians. He identified this goddess with Οὐρανίη, the Celestial Goddess, a Semitic divinity associated with Aphrodite. Elsewhere in the *Histories* she is mentioned as being worshipped in Syria (1.105, presumably Astarte), by the Arabians (3.8, her Arabian name being given as Alilat) and by the Scythians (4.59, her Scythian name being given as Artimpasa). Aphrodite is likewise mentioned as being worshipped by the Assyrians (1.199, Mulitta), the Egyptians (2.41, presumably Hathor), the Tyrians (2.112, Aphrodite the Stranger, presumably Astarte, but associated by Herodotus with Helen of Troy), the Cyrenaeans (2.181)[98] and again the Scythians (4.67). A Greek Aphrodite is absent from the *Histories*. From all these passages it becomes clear that Aphrodite in Herodotus' *Histories* was the common denomination of a variety of Oriental and Egyptian goddesses, rather than Artemis who is predominantly Greek and Graeco-Anatolian.

The curious information given by Herodotus, that the Persians learnt the worship of the Celestial Goddess from their Semitic neighbours, shows the diffusionist views he had on the worship of this particular divinity.[99] It is difficult to decide whether this idea prompted him to write that the worship of Aphrodite was a novelty in the religion of the Persians, or whether he had learnt from Persians that this was in fact the case. If a Persian had told him that the worship of the Celestial goddess was a novelty, this would be a very interesting insider's point of view, because the goddess

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[97] *HZ* II, 179.

[98] For the identifications of Aphrodite in the second book of the *Historiae* see the exhaustive commentaries in Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II, ad locum.*

[99] Cf. Mora, *Religione e religioni*, 231-233.

Herodotus refers to is undoubtedly an ancient Western Iranian goddess. Anyone claiming that the goddess was a recent addition to the pantheon, would therefore presumably have been a Zoroastrian from a region where this goddess had not been worshipped before. We shall return to this subject below.

There is only one goddess who could fit the label of Celestial goddess Herodotus gives: Anāhitā. This has been almost universally accepted. No known form of Iranian religion knows of another goddess who could have been interpreted as the Oriental Aphrodite. The only other goddess from the Avesta who could have been meant is Aši,[100] the goddess of Reward, an ancient, pre-Zoroastrian divinity, who remained tremendously popular in Eastern Iran, but whose popularity in Western Iran was eclipsed by that of Anāhitā. Aši was probably also worshipped by the Scythians, for Herodotus gives the name of the Scythian Aphrodite as Artimpasa (4.59), the first part of which must be **arti*, the expected Old Iranian form which evolved into Avestan Aši.[101] The history of these two goddesses, Aši and Anāhitā, is complicated but relevant for the passage in Herodotus.

The origins of Anāhitā are still unclear. In the Avesta, she is referred to by three epithets, *arəduuī sūrā anāhitā*, "moist, strong, undefiled." These epithets continued to function as her name, which for example in Pahlavi-literature is given as either *Ardwīsūr* or *(A)nāhīd*. Lommel has suggested that these originally were the epithets of a goddess known in India as Sarasvati, Iranian *Harahvati, representing the primal river.[102] This river-function of Anāhitā is clear from parts of her great hymn, Yt. 5. The main part of Yt. 5, however, is a compilation of texts from the hymn to Aši, Yt. 17. Aši, the goddess of Reward, is hailed in her hymn as the goddess who brings fertility to those who worship her with a proper ritual, and who withdraws whenever hardship comes over mankind, to return with the birth of young things.

In Western Iranian lands, Aši is not well-attested. There is only one possible personal name with her name in it in the Elamite onomasticon, *Hartikka*, but even this is uncertain.[103] In the Elamite tablets, mention is made of a divinity Mižduši (El. *d.mi-iš-du-ši*, *d.mi-iš-du-ši-iš*), who is generally connected with Avestan Aši, but apparently was not the same divinity; at most they shared some functions and characteristics.[104] Aši is unknown in Armenia; she does, however, occur frequently in Pahlavi literature.

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[100] On Aṣ̌i, cf. Kreyenbroek, 'On the Shaping of Zoroastrian Theology', in: Bernard & Grenet (eds.), *Histoire et cultes*, 137-145.

[101] Thus Nyberg, *Religionen*, 254.

[102] H. Lommel, 'Anahita-Sarasvati', in: *Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Weller zum 65. Geburtstag*, Leipzig 1954, 405-413.

[103] Mayrhofer, *OnPers* 8.484. The Iranian name in Greek *Artibarzanēs* is not attributed to Arti/Aši, but to the cosmic principle *arta-*: *OnPers* 8.596.

Anāhitā (as opposed to Aši) is not found in the Old Avestan texts. Her presence in the Avesta, apart from Yt. 5 and the Ābān Niyāyišn, is surprisingly limited, and almost everywhere directly dependent on Yt. 5 (e.g. Y. 65.1-4). Anāhitā in the Avesta is not a prominent divinity. The same applies to Pahlavi literature, where Nāhīd or Ardwīsūr is sometimes mentioned in connection with the planet Venus (noticeable also in the fact that this planet is still called *nāhīd* in Persian), but is never mentioned as a very prominent goddess.

The earliest non-Avestan occurrence of Anāhitā's name is in the OP inscriptions, where she suddenly appears, together with Mithra, in some late texts (A^2Sd, A^2Sa and A^2Ha). In the fragment from Berossus mentioned above we have the first undisputed reference to Anāhitā's cult. After the period of the Old Persian inscriptions and the presumed date of composition of Berossus' *Babyloniaca*, Anāhitā has captured the West to such an extent that she came to be regarded as the most important Persian divinity. Her cult has been amply described by Classical authors, is attested in many inscriptions and her statue is represented on the coins of several Anatolian cities. Anāhitā (in her Arm. name *Anahit*) was certainly the most popular divinity in Armenia, the patron divinity of a country which named an entire province after her (for all these matters, cf. ch. 4.1.3).

All this makes it very likely that Anāhitā was originally a Western Iranian goddess. The popularity of Anāhitā in Western Iran (including Armenia and Anatolia) is disproportionate compared to her popularity in Eastern Iran. There is, however, one discrepancy which is in need of consideration: personal names containing the name of Anāhitā are unknown from pre-Sasanian Western Iran.

The origins of the cult of Anāhitā are unknown, but most scholars seem to be agreed on one general aspect: the strong

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[104] For the mentions of Mižduši, cf. H. Koch, *Religiösen Verhältnisse*, 90-91; the comparison between Mižduši and Aši was first suggested by I. Gershevitch, 'Iranian Nouns and Names in Elamite Garb', *TPS* 1969, 165-200, p. 174.

Semitic influence on the cult of Anāhitā. If Avestan Aredvī was a river-goddess, there might be a logical connection between her aquatic personality and her functioning as a fertility goddess, but her overpowering role as a warrior queen and as a goddess of love and healing, as she appears in her hymn and in the Classical texts, cannot be logically connected with her Avestan namesake. Therefore, a connection with Babylonian Ištar, or with Elamite Nanaia, is generally assumed. There is a compelling logic to this position, if one assumes the Western Iranians (Persians and Medes) to have been part of what is generally called the Ancient Near East, where great goddesses were an important part of the religious world (e.g. Ištar, Nanaia, Arabian Alilat, Phoenician Astarte and Anatolian Cybele). The connection of many of these great goddesses with astronomical speculations and of Anāhitā with the planet Venus, makes this even more probable. Boyce has developed a theory for the origins of the Anāhitā cult, which seems worthy of consideration. She argues that the Western Iranians learnt to worship a goddess associated with the planet Venus (Ištar, Nanaia) under the Iranian name for this planet *Anāhiti, which gave rise to the Greek rendering of this name as Anaïtis, and to MP *nāhīd*, "Venus". When Zoroastrianism arrived in Western Iran, the popularity of this *Anāhiti was such that she had to be incorporated in the Avesta. She was easily adopted into the Avestan pantheon by equating her with the goddess Aredvi Sura Anahita.[105] Further research on the different aspects of Anāhitā's personality would be necessary to endorse this theory, but it at least offers an interpretation that takes into account the varied aspects of the goddess and the question of the Semitic and Graeco-Anatolian elements in her cult.

If, then, the origins of the cult of Anāhitā are partly to be attributed to Semitic religions, the information Herodotus offers is strikingly correct: Anāhitā is not part of the "original" pantheon, but is a latecomer, a goddess such as they are worshipped by the neighbours of the Western Iranians. This correspondence, however, is not entirely satisfactory, because it raises important questions with regard to Herodotus' sources. If Herodotus here reports on a situation as it was explained to him by an Iranian informant, this informant must have been one for whom the cult of the goddess was a recent innovation, in other words an Eastern

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[105] *HZ* II, 29-31; 201-204.

Iranian. This, however, seems unlikely. It is more probable that Herodotus' observations are connected with his explanation of the similarity of a variety of Oriental goddesses, whom he identifies with Aphrodite Urania. He explains this similarity as the result of diffusion: the goddess was originally a Babylonian goddess, but her cult spread over all Oriental peoples, including the Persians.

Herodotus continues by giving the indigenous names among the Assyrians, Arabians and Persians for the Celestial Queen. The Assyrians call her Mylitta, the Arabians call her Alilat and the Persians call her Mitra.[106] There is a certain inconsistency in the use of the cases in this passage. Whereas the name of Mitra is given in the accusative, the name of Mylitta is left undeclined (as it is in 1.199: Ἐπικαλέω τοι τὴν θεὸν Μύλιττα). Some manuscripts give the name of the Arabian goddess as Ἄλιττα, evidently under the influence of the name Mylitta.

The Assyrian and Arabian names are comparatively transparent. Mylitta is the Greek version of Babylonian *Mulissu*, the spouse of Assur.[107] She is also mentioned in *Histories* 1.199 in connection with temple-prostitution. Alilat is the name of the national goddess of the Arabians.[108] She is also mentioned by Herodotus in *Histories* 3.8 as the goddess the Arabians invoke when they swear an oath. Both goddesses are national goddesses, just as Anāhitā later became a national goddess for the Persians, the bestower of sovereignty.

The different explanations of the Persian name of the Celestial goddess, Mitra, can be divided into three groups. Most specialists are convinced that Herodotus here introduces the name of Mithra and that he has made a mistake in explaining Mithra as a female divinity. Within this group, some scholars have argued that Anāhitā's name was replaced by Mithra's name, because of the close associations between these two divinities,[109] or because of the fact that Mithra and Anāhitā were *parhedroi*, enjoyed a shared cult.[110] Most scholars of this group, however, have only stressed the fact that these two divinities were the most popular divinities of Western Iran, shared some functions and could easily have been mixed up.[111] Some scholars have suggested defective manuscript traditions,[112] emending the name into Ναιτταν.

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[106] That Herodotus uses a tau instead of a theta for the Iranian voiceless dental fricative (θ) in Mithra's name is consistent with his rendering of the name *miθradāta-* as Μιτραδάτης (*Histories* 1.110; 1.121) and *miθrapāta-* as Μιτροβάτης (*Histories* 3.120; 3.126-127).

[107] For whom, cf. M. Stol, 'Mullissu', *DDD* 1138-1140.

[108] Cf. M. Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Mythologie* I (1965), s.vv. 'Allāt' and 'Urania' (pp. 422-423; 473-474).

[109] Moulton, *EZ*, 394.

A second group of interpreters has attempted to find the origin of the "mistake" within the Persian religion itself. They do not consider the name in this passage to be a mistake, but have suggested that it rather reveals some unknown aspects of the religions of ancient Iran. Two possibilities have been suggested. The evidence from Kuṣāṇa coins, on which μιορο (**mihr*) is represented as a female divinity, has been adduced to show that Mithra was not always considered a male divinity.[113] Another interpretation has pointed at the Avesta, where Mithra is said to go around the world before the sun (Yt. 10.13; Vd. 1.28-29); the planet that goes before the sun being Venus, Herodotus was right in calling Venus (Aphrodite) Mithras.[114]

Finally, there are some who think that the defective writing is due to defective Greek pronunciation. Two possibilities have been suggested. The first of these concerns Herodotus: when he was told that sacrifices were offered to Mithra, he heard this name as μητρα and—due to the identical sound of *ēta* and *iota*—assumed that reference was made to the Anatolian Mother goddess.[115] The other interpretation takes the opposite direction of the same argument: Herodotus' source wanted to introduce the worship of Anāhitā "the Mother," but did not know the correct Greek accusative of the word μήτηρ, and gave it in a hybrid form μητρα(ν), which Herodotus took to be a foreign name, writing it down as Μιτραν.[116]

Most of these theories are open to criticism. The evidence of the Bactrian coins can hardly be appropriate, because Mithra was the masculine god *par excellence* in Western Iran and it is unimaginable that there was confusion with regard to his sex. The Bactrian coins, moreover, are late and have little bearing on the religious situation in Western Iran.

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[110] Nyberg, *Religionen*, 370.

[111] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 27-28.

[112] Most noticeably the earlier editions of Schwyzer and Hommel; cf. the Budé-edition of Herodotus by Ph.-E. Legrand, *ad locum*.

[113] M. Bussagli, 'Royauté, guerre et fécondité. A propos d'une monnaie kuṣāṇa', *RHR* 140 (1951), 129-54.

[114] M.J. Edwards, 'Herodotus and Mithras: *Histories* I.131', *AJP* 111 (1990), 1-4.

[115] R. Merkelbach, *Mithras*, Königstein 1984, 10 with n. 1.

[116] Th. Corsten, 'Herodot I 131 und die Einführung des Anahita-Kultes in Lydien', *IrAnt* 26 (1991), 163-80.

Mithra and Anāhitā can hardly be described as *parhedroi*, for there is not a single known temple where they were worshipped together. The associations between the two divinities should not be exaggerated either. They are mentioned—together with Ahura Mazdā—in some OP inscriptions, but the evidence from Armenia and Asia Minor shows Anāhitā to have been more intimately connected with Ahura Mazdā, Verethraghna (in the case of Armenia), with Vohu Manah and some Graeco-Anatolian divinities.

The evidence adduced from Yt. 10 to show that Mithra is actually associated with the planet Venus must also be rejected. Herodotus starts by saying that the Persians worship the Celestial Goddess, so we should be looking for a female divinity. There actually is a female divinity associated with the planet Venus, Anāhitā, and Mithra is nowhere else associated with this planet. The assumption that Herodotus' informant was misguided by a question concerning the divinity associated with Venus, and then came up with some Avestan passages where Mithra could be interpreted as going before the sun, which—in a purely astrological context—could indicate Venus, runs counter not only to most interpretations of Yt. 10, but also to general ideas on the transmission of religious knowledge among the Zoroastrians. The relations between Mithras and the Sun are very complex, both in Zoroastrianism and in Mithraism: Mithras is the Sun and not the Sun at the same time; the imagery invoked to explain *Histories* 1.131 has also been explained as a reference to the Dawn.[117]

The theories focusing on the Greek word for "mother" are based on the assumption that the ēta already sounded as /i/ in the fifth century BCE, which is an opinion not generally shared. A more serious problem is the fact that Anāhitā was, to our knowledge, never called "Mother" in Iran.[118] Her later association with the Anatolian Great Mother is to be understood from a Graeco-Anatolian background, and is useless in the case of Herodotus, because he interprets the Celestial Queen not as the Mother goddess or as Artemis, but as Aphrodite.

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[117] J. Kellens, 'Les bras de Miθra', in Bianchi (ed.), *Mysteria Mithrae*, 703-716.

[118] Although the Arm name *Oskemayr*, "the golden mother" (Russell, *ZorArm*, 248) is probably correctly interpreted as a cult epithet of Anāhitā.

It seems reasonable to assume that Herodotus indeed made a mistake and confused two divine names that meant little to him to begin with. Alternatively, one could invoke manuscript deficiencies. Herodotus' renderings of foreign divine names are a constant source of confusion. The name of the Arabian goddess has been restored twice (*Histories* 1.131; 3.8) to Alilat; in both passages where it occurs it has been influenced by another divine name: in 1.131, the name is given as *Alitta*, under the influence of *Mylitta*; in 3.8, it is given as *Alital*, under the influence of the following (unidentified) Arabian divine name *Orotal(t)*. The name of the Scythian goddess, Artimpasa or Argimpasa, is also known in various permutations.

And the sacrifice among the Persians for the gods mentioned above consists of the following: they do not make altars nor light a fire when they want to sacrifice; they do not use a libation, nor a flute, wreaths, or grains of wheat.

Apart from the first sentence, which is perfectly clear in itself, this passage is a veritable catalogue of the Greek sacrificial *essentialia*. In this respect it is very much like the opening phrase of 1.131. It uses the same contrastive reasoning, in that it briefly presents the main elements of the Greek ritual and notices their absence among the Persians. The Persian sacrifice is something else. One of the interesting facts is that Herodotus makes some contradictory statements, because right after denying the use of fire and wreaths in the sacrificial ritual, they are both introduced: the sacrificer wears a wreath around his *tiara* and the meat is cooked. These statements, therefore, can only be understood if they are read in connection with the specific use of wreaths and fire in Greek rituals, which indeed does not correspond at all with the use of wreaths and fire in the Persian sacrificial ritual as described by Herodotus.

We have already paid some attention to the question of the altar. The Greek *bōmos* was used as a place to put the sacrificial portions on, just as it was (with some important modifications) in the religion of ancient Israel (Lev 3:1-5; the LXX here uses the word θυσιαστήϱιον, reserving the word βωμός for pagan altars) and in other religions of the Ancient Near East. In Zoroastrianism, the idea of sacrificial portions is absent and sacrifices are not burnt. There is therefore no comparable structure to the Greek altar among the Persians. What we term an "altar" in Iranian religious traditions, is the base for the fire-vase, which serves no other purpose than to carry the fire.

According to Herodotus, the Persians do not light a fire (Herodotus uses the verb ἀνακαίω, which indicates the lighting of a new fire) when they want to sacrifice. Nevertheless, as we shall see later on, fire is present in this ritual setting: after the animal has been killed and dissected, the pieces of meat are seethed (in a cauldron). The information that the Persians do not light a fire when they want to sacrifice, in other words, must imply that they do not light a fire *as part of the ritual,* i.e. that they do not burn (parts of) the victim in the fire, just as they do not have an altar with a burning fire on it. Although fire is the most important element in the present day rituals of the Zoroastrians and is tended during the daily *Yasna*, it does not follow that it was an important element in sacrificial rites among the Persians in the fifth century BCE. Sacrificial rituals have disappeared altogether from the Parsi rituals, but are still being observed by the Zoroastrians of Iran.[119] In these rituals, just like the rituals described by Herodotus, fire is only used for the cooking of the meat.

The puzzling statement that the Persians do not make libations (σπονδή) is somewhat more difficult to interpret. Libations are an essential part of the *Yasna*. Libations (Av. *zaoθra-*, Phl. *zōhr*) have also been noticed by several Classical authors,[120] and in *Histories* 7.43, the Magi pour out libations (perhaps significantly not σπονδή but χοή) to the Heroes of Troy, whereas Xerxes is sacrificing to Ilian Athena (!).

The only satisfying explanation is—again—the specific nature of the Greek libation, the pouring of (usually) wine from a small jug, accompanied by prayers.[121] The Iranian libations are libations of water (mixed with plant-juice and milk) or of fat, according to their function: the libation to water consists of water, the libation to fire of fat.[122] Not only the substances of the libations differ, but also their place in the ritual. The Greeks poured their libations on the fire or on the earth, the Iranians in sources of water. In Greece, libations prepared and concluded the sacrifice, whereas the Iranians—as far as we can reconstruct—considered libation rituals and animal sacrifice to be distinct rituals that could be performed separately. The *Yasna* is concluded by pouring a libation into a source of water.

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[119] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 244-246 (and cf. index, s.v. 'sacrifice').

[120] E.g. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 2.3.1; Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.14; Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertatio* 2.4; cf. ch. 4.6.1.

[121] Burkert, *GR*, 70; Graf, 'Milch, Honig und Wein.'

[122] For which, cf. M. Boyce, 'Ātaš-zōhr and Āb-zōhr', and the references given in ch. 4.6.1.

The absence of flutes, wreaths and *oulai* (grains of wheat) in the rituals of the Persians must have been surprising for a Greek audience, but does not tell us anything of interest on the Persian manner of sacrifice. We know virtually nothing of ancient Iranian music, but musicians are never associated with religious rituals, although the regular merrymaking in present day Zoroastrian festivals does include music. The absence of *oulai* is no surprise either, for they are a specifically Greek element in rituals connected with animal sacrifice. There are different kinds of wreaths, and Herodotus mentions one type of wreath in the following phrase: the sacrificer wears a wreath around his *tiara*.

"The sacrifice is a festive occasion for the community. The contrast with everyday life is marked with washing, dressing in clean garments, and adornment, in particular, wearing a garland woven from twigs on the head—a feature which does not yet appear in Homer. The animal chosen is to be perfect, and it too is adorned, entwined with ribbons, with its horns gilded. A procession escorts the animal to the altar. [...] A blameless maiden at the front of the procession carries on her head the sacrificial basket in which the knife for sacrifice lies concealed beneath grains of barley or cakes. A vessel containing water is also borne along, and often an incense burner; accompanying the procession is one or several musicians, normally a male or female flute-player. The goal is the stone altar or pile of ashes laid down or erected of old. Only there may and must blood be shed."[123] In this description of the Greek sacrificial procession it is not difficult to recognise most elements mentioned by Herodotus as absent from the sacrificial rituals of the Persians. The information in this passage is therefore of little practical use for the reconstruction of Iranian rituals. It does, however, give an interesting catalogue of what a Greek individual in the fifth century BCE considered to be normal or essential in sacrificial rites. The introductory nature of this clause sets a clear picture for Greek readers what not to expect, in order to open their minds for the different customs among the Persians.

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[123] Burkert, *GR*, 56.

But when one of them wants to sacrifice to any of these (gods), he leads the animal to a pure place and calls upon the god, having adorned his tiara with a wreath, usually of myrtle.

Sacrifices are performed for individual divinities. The sacrificer/ dedicant decides which god is to be addressed. This is exactly what one would expect on the basis of the sacrificial rituals described in the *Yašts*, which always stress the performance of sacrifices, in which the divinity is mentioned by his or her own name. In present day Zoroastrian rituals a *Yasna* can be dedicated to a specific divinity by reciting his or her *šnūman*[124] (a short dedicatory formula) before the ritual. It is likely, however, that in ancient Iran the sacrifice could be dedicated to a divinity by using specific invocations addressed to him or her.

In the Avesta there is plenty of evidence for the practice of choosing specific divinities for their (practical) qualities. If matters of procreation, fertility and delivery are important, sacrifices are performed to honour Aši or Anāhitā, if rain is needed, rituals are performed for Tištrya or Mithra, if victory in battle is needed, for Verethraghna or the Fravašis. It is to this kind of sacrifice Herodotus refers.

The Persian ritual Herodotus describes is a lay animal sacrifice. The word he uses for the sacrificial victim, κτῆνος, indicates cattle, such as cows, sheep, horses etc., rather than birds which were, as far as we know, rarely used in Iranian sacrifices. These—or the ideal sacrifices described in the *Yašts*—consisted of horses, cows, sheep or goats.

The animal is taken to a pure place. In modern Zoroastrianism, most rituals are performed in the temples and shrines, where the preservation of purity is much easier. Herodotus describes the situation before the introduction of temple-cult, and we do not know what the rules of purity for a sacrificial place would have been. In 1.131, Herodotus mentioned that sacrifices were performed on a mountaintop. The definition of purity varies considerably, but in an Iranian context it would at least require an absence of dead matter. In Vd. 8.14-15, Zarathustra asks Ahura Mazdā if it is permitted to carry the sacred fire and the sacred ritual sticks (*barsom*) along a way where there have been corpses of dogs and men, and Ahura Mazdā answers that this is not allowed. This may be an indication of the requirements of the ritual space for an Iranian open-air sacrifice.

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[124] On the *šnūman*, cf. Modi, *CC*, 381-382.

The sacrificer then invokes the god. He is not identified as a priest; the ritual is therefore a lay sacrifice, even though, as we shall see, a priest is present. Such lay sacrifices have been recorded in the Avesta: the sacrificer is there referred to as the *nar-maṅiia-* (Yt. 10.137).[125]

The invocation of the divinity before the beginning of the ritual (after the victim has been led to the "pure place"), is often described in the *Yašts*. There the divinities ask for sacrifices in which they are invoked by their own name (Av. *yasna- aoxtō-nāman-*). Mithra, for instance, addresses the faithful thus: "If indeed men would worship me with a sacrifice in which my name is spoken, as other gods are worshipped with a sacrifice in which their name is spoken, I would have come to the righteous men, for the length of their appointed time; interrupting my own radiant immortal life I would have come." (Yt. 10.55).[126] Similar formulas also occur in other hymns. The ideal sacrifice for a divinity is the sacrifice in which the words are well spoken and in which the name of the divinity is mentioned.

The sacrificer wears a *tiara* with a myrtle wreath. The Greek word may be of Iranian origin, but the Iranian word rendered is unknown.[127] The tiara—or what is usually understood to be the tiara—is the distinctive head gear of the Persians.[128] It is a conical hat (turban) and should not be confused with the head gear worn by priests, which has side flips that are folded together to cover the mouth (for this head gear, see the commentary on Strabo). The tiara in this ritual presumably has no religious function, other than to cover the head. It is not intended to single out the dedicant. The use of a wreath of flowers or green leaves on the tiara possibly is. It is not customary in the present day Zoroastrian sacrificial rituals to adorn the hat or cap worn with leafs or flowers, but this is still the custom among the Mandaeans.

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[125] Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 110-111; Gershevitch, *AHM*, 224.

[126] *yeiδi zī mā maṣ̌iiāka aoxtōnāmana yasna yazaiiaṇta yaθa aṅiie yazatå ŋhō aoxtōnāmana yasna yazəṇti frā nuruiiō aṣ̌auuaoiiō θβarštahe zrū āiiu š́ušuiiąm x^{v}ahe gaiiehe x^{v}anuuatō aməṣ̌ahe upa θβarštahe jaγmiiąm*. Cf. Gershevitch, *AHM*, 100-101; 207.

[127] Cf. Schmitt, 'Medisches und persisches Sprachgut', 138 with n. 164.

[128] For the tiara, cf. B. Goldman, 'Darius III, the Alexander Mosaic and the *Tiara Ortho*', *Mesopotamia* 28 (1993), 51-69, with a large bibliography and many examples.

The rituals of the Mandaeans, particularly the liturgical vestments and instruments, contain many Iranian elements which are often known by Zoroastrian names (e.g. the *sadra*, the liturgical vest and the *margna*, the mace).[129] The Mandaean priestly head gear is of importance for the information Herodotus offers. A Mandaean priest first wears the *tagha* (an Iranian loan word, meaning "crown"), then a turban (comparable with the *tiara* in Herodotus) and on top of the turban the so-called *klīla* (crown). This *klīla* is a myrtle wreath and distinguishes the priest.[130] It is very likely that this part of the liturgical vestments was influenced by Western Iranian Zoroastrian usage. Herodotus has thus possibly preserved an element of ancient Iranian ritual attire which has vanished from contemporary practices. Myrtle is also a regular and important element of the contemporary Zoroastrian rituals in Iran, where people are welcomed with twigs of myrtle, and receive myrtle after certain rituals.[131] It is also mentioned now and then as part of rituals in Pahlavi texts.

He who performs the sacrifice may not ask for good things for his own interest only, but he prays for good to befall to all the Persians and to the king; for he himself is among all the Persians.

This passage in Herodotus' description of the religion of the Persians has sometimes been used in laudatory passages describing the noble character of the ancient Iranian *nomoi*, but most scholars are at a loss as to the real meaning of the text. Benveniste concluded from this passage that the sacrifice described was part of the official cult and not a private matter.[132] This does not follow from the text, however. In Herodotus' description a private individual offers a specific sacrifice for a divinity he has chosen. There is nothing to suggest an official status for this ritual.

The custom of praying for the well-being of the king and of the other Persians is amply attested in both the Avesta and the Pahlavi texts. There seems to be a slight difference as to the community addressed. Herodotus makes it perfectly clear that the prayer for well-being is a prayer for the Persians and their kings, thus giving it a national interpretation. The Avestan and Middle Persian evidence, connected with the *Āfrīnagān* and other shorter ceremonies, can be explained more easily as asking well-being for the community of the believers, in their opposition against the followers of the evil doctrine, thus presenting a credal interpretation.

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[129] Drower, *Mandaeans*, 30-40.

[130] Drower, *Mandaeans*, 35-36; a layman also wears the *klīla*, "after his first triple ablution at full baptism" (*ibid*., p. 35).

[131] Boyce, *Stronghold*, index s.v. 'myrtle'.

[132] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 30.

The best evidence from the Avesta is the short laudatory invocation to the goddess Dahma Āfriti, "Pious Blessing" (Y. 60.2-7).[133] This text has a priestly context and is therefore not entirely compatible with Herodotus' information, but it does indicate the importance of the community in the ritual. During the blessing, the priest invokes the divinities thus: "To this house may there come the satisfactions of the just, and the rewards and recompenses and welcomings. May there arise now for this community order and dominion and prosperity and fortune and ease and long supremacy of this Ahuric, Zoroastrian, religion. In this community now may cattle not be harmed, order not be harmed, the strength of the just man not be harmed, the Ahuric doctrine not be harmed." (Y. 60.2-3, trl. Boyce).

The prayers in the Avesta therefore betray this double attitude: blessings are invoked for the individual who dedicates the ritual, and for the community, which includes the dedicant. The stress placed upon the well-being of the community is also apparent from one of the most important Zoroastrian prayers, the *Ā airiiəmā išiiō* (Y. 54.1). There the community is asked to come to the support of the followers of Zarathustra and to uphold the Ahuric religion together. The prayers for the king are an important part of the *Āfrīnagān ī Dahmān* and its Pahlavi translation. In this benediction (A. 1.8), the ruler of the land is praised and long life, victory and health are asked for him. The Pahlavi version, which certainly originates in a culture steeped in royal rituals, reflects the benediction of the king more elaborately.[134]

Then, when he has cut the victim to pieces and seethed the pieces of meat, he spreads out very tender grass, usually trefoil, and places the pieces of meat on it.

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[133] For this divinity, cf. M. Boyce, 'Dahma Āfriti and Some Related Problems', *BSOAS* 56 (1993), 209-218.

[134] Dhabhar, *TrlZXA*, 274-275.

Herodotus omits one important step in his description of the sacrificial ritual: the killing of the victim. This is unfortunate, because this is one of the unknown aspects of early Iranian sacrificial rites (for which, cf. ch. 3.2 and ch. 4.6.2). The animal is cut to pieces and these pieces of meat are cooked. This is what one would expect on the basis of modern practices[135] and, for instance, Y. 11.1: "Three truly righteous (creatures) call out in scorn, the cow, the horse and Haoma. The cow calls out to the priest: "May you be without offspring, and may you be of bad renown, who do not share me when I'm cooked." The modern Parsi interpretation of this passage is that it incites the faithful to friendliness towards animals.[136] In its Avestan context, however, it is an incitement to share the pieces of meat of the sacrificial animal among the members of the community, a practice also attested elsewhere (e.g. *Aog.* 105).

The dedicant then spreads out grass on the ground and puts the pieces of seethed meat on this mound of grass. Herodotus adds that they usually use trefoil.[137] The mound of grass on which the meat is placed has disappeared from contemporary Zoroastrian rituals, but is known from the Avestan texts and their Pahlavi commentaries. It is a well-attested feature of Vedic religion, where the mound of grass is called the *barhiś*. The corresponding Avestan word, *barziš*, has been attested but only in the meaning "cushion" (Vd. 5.27; 7.9 etc.). In Avestan, the word for the grass appears to have been *barəsman* which regularly takes the verb *star-*, "to spread". In the current ritual terminology, *barsom* (= *barəsman*), is used to indicate the small bundle of twigs held by the priest during the ritual; in the Avesta it means both the grass mound and the bundle of twigs. In contemporary rituals, the mound of grass has been replaced by a clean cloth or carpet.[138]

And when he has arranged it, a Magus who stands close by sings a

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[135] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 246.

[136] Thus Kotwal & Boyd, *A Persian Offering*, 98.

[137] This is difficult to understand. For a possible solution, cf. Parpola, *The Sky-Garment*, 21-29, who adduces many examples from Mesopotamia and from the Indus civilisation, to show that trefoil had important ritual and symbolic functions in these ancient cultures. A more simple solution would to be that trefoil is soft and therefore more suitable (in view of Herodotus' stressing the fact that they use very tender grass) than most other plants.

[138] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 42-43.

theogony—such do they say the invocation is; for without a Magus it is not their custom to sacrifice.

Herodotus describes a lay sacrifice, initiated by an individual layman presumably for a specific purpose. The ritual, however, is attended by a Magus, a priest, who has a double task: to be present and to sing a ritual text, explained to Herodotus as a theogony. The presence of a priest at lay sacrifices is still required among the Zoroastrians of Iran.[139] Priests were and are the guardians of the sacred texts; since these texts are indispensable for the proper performance of the ritual, a ritual without a priest is impossible.

Almost all interpreters of this passage have stated that the invocation, which is explained as a theogony, must be a Yašt, an Avestan hymn or a composition closely resembling the Yašts.[140] These hymns do not correspond fully to the Greek (or Near Eastern) theogonies, a genre unknown in Indo-Iranian literature. They certainly are invocations and laudatory hymns, praising the deeds and character of the divinity addressed. The origin of the divinities is also sometimes alluded to, in a modest way: the deities are created by Ahura Mazdā (Yt. 4.1; Yt. 5.6-7; 10.1), or are presented as his children (Yt. 17.2)). This, however, is not the main subject of the Yašts. In Iranian religions there are no generations of gods who succeed one another; descriptions of the divine origins are therefore quickly settled. Nevertheless, the absence of texts resembling a theogony more than the Yašts do, and the possible ritual function of the Yašts, make it likely that the invocation sung by the Magus at the sacrifice was indeed the appropriate hymn to the divinity addressed.

After a little while in waiting, the sacrificer takes away the pieces of meat and uses them as he thinks best.

There is, as is usual in most ritual contexts, a decent interval between the recitation of the text and the removal of the meat.

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[139] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 245, 253, 259.

[140] There are some exceptions: H.H. Schaeder suggested that the theogony corresponded to the Gāthās: 'Ein indogermanischer Liedtypus in den Gathas', *ZDMG* 94 (1940), 399-408, pp. 407-408; M. Papatheophanes, 'Heraclitus of Ephesus, the Magi and the Achaemenids', *IrAnt* 20 (1985), 101-161, p. 131, made the strange suggestion that the theogony should be compared with the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, although it remains unclear what purpose such a comparison would serve.

Nothing else is done with the meat: the dedicant can take it away and do with it whatever he likes. It is generally shared among those present, but this is not compulsory.

4. Evaluation

Herodotus' description of the religion of the Persians has been scrutinised by generations of students of Iranian religions. The passage has been interpreted in terms of a pure pan-Iranian polytheistic nature-worship untainted by the teachings of Zarathustra. It has also been explained as Zoroastrianism *tout court*. There is an immense gap between these two interpretations. This gap is mainly due to general opinions on the development of Zoroastrianism, and only to a little extent to Herodotus. His description of the Persian religion is mainly important because of its great antiquity, not because of its great informative qualities. A substantial part of the passage is actually concerned with Greek practices and beliefs. Nevertheless, some important observations have been preserved in this earliest description of Zoroastrianism in Greek literature.

The pantheon of the Persians consists of Zeus, a set of elements and luminaries (the sun, the moon, the earth, fire, water and the winds) and the Celestial Aphrodite. These, Herodotus stresses, are the only gods they worship. The worship of Aphrodite, moreover, is a recent phenomenon; the Persians have learnt to worship her from the Assyrians and the Arabians. Although Herodotus' information can be corroborated from Iranian sources as far as the worship of the individual deities is concerned, his overall representation of the pantheon is undoubtedly influenced by a certain conception of religion and of the spread of religious traditions that was typical for Herodotus' time. The Persians do not worship statues, because they do not consider the gods to be of human shape. Instead, they worship Zeus in his manifestation in natural phenomena: going up a mountain and praying under the open sky. That is the original religion of the Persians. The recent introduction of the cult of the Celestial goddess has changed this religion and made it more compatible with the other non-Greek cults: almost all nations except the Greeks have adopted the worship of the Celestial goddess. The cult of Anāhitā, who is probably intended, was a novelty only in Zoroastrianism; in the pre-Zoroastrian religion of ancient Western Iran, it has been suggested that Anāhitā (or Anāhiti) had been worshipped for centuries already.

Most of the practical aspects of Herodotus' description of Persian religion recall similar information from Zoroastrian literature and from contemporary practices. Thus, the worship at high places, the lay sacrifice, the absence of fire in a sacrificial ritual, can all be interpreted in comparison with a disparate mass of data from Iranian and related religions. The combination of all these aspects, however, is peculiar to Herodotus; we therefore have to rely on his testimony. It is often thought that Herodotus did not witness Persian rituals: his description of the sacrifice, for instance, is too fragmentary to support the idea that he had been present at such an occasion. If he did not witness rituals, however, he certainly must have spoken to Greeks who had or to Persians willing to inform him on the practicalities of their religion. The meagreness of the information given by Herodotus precludes a conclusion either way.

2. *Strabo,* Geography *15.3.13-15*

1. *Introduction*

Four centuries passed between Herodotus and Strabo, the next Greek author of whom a sizeable description of Persian customs and religion has been preserved. In these four centuries, the Persian empire had disappeared and been replaced first by the empire of Alexander and then by a number of larger and smaller Hellenistic kingdoms, which had often been at war among themselves. A new supranational power, Rome, had risen. By the time Strabo was born, the Romans were conquering large parts of the world and establishing Roman rule where previously local or national powers had held sway. Apart from the Romans, the only other nation that could lay claim to a reputation of world-power were the Parthians, but their affairs were mostly centred to the East of where Strabo's interests lay.

Strabo was born around the year 63 BCE in Amaseia in Pontus; his date of death is also uncertain, but it is often thought to have been around 23 CE.[1] Strabo's family had lived in Pontus for several generations; they were close to the local Mithradatic dynasty, but turned their back on the royal family when the Roman pressure became too great. Instead, they established cordial relations with the Romans in the person of Lucullus, the then governor of Asia, which turned sour when Lucullus was ousted by Pompey.[2]

Strabo was from a Greek family and received part of his education in Nysa (*Geography* 14.1.48). He spent a substantial part of his life travelling. In his travels, he covered a sizeable part of the inhabited world: "I have travelled from Armenia to the West, to the territory of Tyrrhenia opposite Sardinia, and from the Black Sea coast to the South, to the borders of Ethiopia." (*Geography* 2.5.11).

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[1] For introductions to Strabo's life, works and character, cf. G. Aujac & F. Lasserre, *Strabon. Géographie* I.1, Paris 1968, ix-xlviii; E.Ch.L. van der Vliet, *Strabo over landen, volken, en steden, bezien tegen de historische en sociale achtergronden van zijn leven en werken* (Diss. Leiden), Assen/Amsterdam 1977. For Strabo's *Geography* and its technical, philosophical, and ethnographical background, cf. G. Aujac, *Strabon et la science de son temps*, Paris 1966; E.Ch.L. van der Vliet, 'L'ethnographie de Strabon: Idéologie ou tradition?', in: F. Prontera (ed.), *Strabone. Contributi allo studio della personalità e dell'opera*, Perugia 1984, 27-86.

[2] For which episode, cf. Green, *Alexander to Actium*, 656-657; McGing, *Foreign Policy*, 162-164.

Two major works were written by Strabo, the *Historical Commentaries* and the *Geography*, of which only the latter survives; the *Historical Commentaries* were meant as a continuation of the historical work of Polybius. Polybius, in fact, is generally seen as Strabo's most important source of inspiration. Just as Polybius had devoted separate books of his historical narrative to the geography of the world (cf. Strabo, *Geography* 8.1.1), Strabo also composed a separate geographical work: the *Geography*. Seventeen books of the *Geography* have been preserved with only minor lacunae. The first two books discuss the principles of the work, predecessors and similar introductory matters. The other fifteen books contain descriptions of large parts of the world, discussing physical features of the various regions, but most of all the peoples inhabiting the world and their customs.

The intended audience of the *Geography* were upper-class and higher-ranking officials and politicians, who were in need of a sound knowledge of the various parts of the world and the customs and sensitivities of the peoples living there.[3] This explains why Strabo only describes "useful" lands and regions: those areas where contacts between the readers of the *Geography* and the local inhabitants could be expected. Contrary to the interests of several other geographers, Strabo pays but little attention to those peoples who lived in very distant lands, some imaginative accounts of whom have survived.[4] Of the lands he describes, he also pays attention mainly to useful information. This information is meant for politicians, as he writes in *Geography* 1.1.16.

In the fifteenth book of the *Geography*, Strabo discusses the customs of the Persians. The passage on the Persians and their customs, 15.3.13-20, is organised in different sections, where different aspects of Persian life are described. Both the actual information and the organisation of the subjects bear a striking resemblance to the description of Persian *nomoi* in Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131-140. This situation is frequently interpreted in terms of borrowing: Strabo copied Herodotus' description of Persian life, changing aspects that had lost their relevance and adding information he had obtained from other sources or from personal observations.[5] But this is probably not the case. Strabo refers to Herodotus in some passages,[6] but it has been argued that he never had a first-hand acquaintance with Herodotus' work.[7]

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[3] Van der Vliet, *Strabo*, 102-111.

[4] Cf. Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, *passim*.

[5] Thus Moulton, *EZ*, 407-410; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 100-110; Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 53-56; *HZ* III, 294-295.

Of those sources which Strabo certainly used, the most important ones were Eratosthenes' description of the world, Polybius' historical works and the geographical works of Artemidorus (1st century BCE). These authors, however, do not qualify as Strabo's possible source for the passage on Persian customs. It has been suggested that Hecataeus of Miletus could have been the common source for Strabo *and* for Herodotus.[8] The difficulty with this reconstruction is the fact that Hecataean influence on Herodotus is often considered problematic.[9] The two descriptions of Persian life in Herodotus and Strabo are uncannily similar. They are compared in diagram 1.

It has been observed that the categories Strabo includes in his description of the customs of the Persians are partly similar to those he uses in his descriptions of other nations.[10] His description of the customs of the Persians is unique in one respect, however: the detailed attention Strabo pays to the rituals of the Persians and the Cappadocian fire-priests. Whereas Strabo, in spite of his extensive travels, appears to have made little use of personal observations of various districts of the world, the description of the Persian rituals and that of the temple-states in Pontus, Armenia and Cappadocia, are undoubtedly based on his personal observations.[11]

Strabo never visited Iran. From his own words, we know that Armenia was the most Eastern destination of his travels (*Geography* 2.5.11). This situation may perhaps explain the often noted discrepancies between his description of the religion of the Persians and the religion of the Persian rituals in Cappadocia. Thus, while Strabo repeats that the Persians have no statues, he mentions a statue of Omanos; while he repeats that the Persians have no temples, he mentions temples of Persian gods; while he does *not* repeat that the Persians have no altars, he seems to be unaware of them.

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[6] *Geography* 11.14.16, on "sacred prostitution" among the Lydians; 12.2.4 on Egypt. For the nature of Strabo's "quotations" of other authors, cf. Aujac & Lasserre, *Strabon. Géographie* I.1, 47-49.

[7] F. Lasserre, 'Histoire de première main dans la Géographie de Strabon', in Prontera (ed.), *Strabone* I, 11-26, p. 23, n. 15; Lasserre refers to K.-A. Riemann, *Das herodoteische Geschichtswerk in der Antike* (Diss. München 1967), 47-55, which was unavailable to me.

[8] F. Lasserre, 'Hérodote et Protagoras: Le débat sur les constitutions', *MH* 33 (1976), 65-84, p. 71 with n. 25.

[9] For a discussion, cf. ch. 3.1.1.

[10] Van der Vliet, *Strabo*, 198-199.

[11] Thus also Van der Vliet, *ibid*.

Subject	Herodotus	Strabo
Religion: the pantheon	1.131	15.3.13
Religion: sacrifice	1.132	15.3.14-15
Birthday	1.133	*not mentioned*
Drinking wine	1.133	15.3.20
Politeness	1.134	15.3.20
Marriage	1.135	15.3.17
Education	1.136	15.3.18
Presentation of the son before his father	1.136	15.3.17
Murder	1.137	*not mentioned*
Debts	1.138	*not mentioned*
Lepers	1.138	*not mentioned*
Sanctity of rivers	1.138	15.3.16
Burial	1.140	15.3.20
Burial among the Magi	1.140	15.3.20

Diagram 1

Strabo's account of the religion of the Persians is partly unsatisfactory. Apart from the information already known from Herodotus, Strabo does not treat Persian beliefs at all. Instead of this, he gives a very detailed description of ritual practices and paraphernalia.[12] These descriptions are very important for the reconstruction of the development of Iranian rituals. Several elements of Zoroastrian rituals described by Strabo reflect rituals of a very high antiquity (for instance the omentum-offering); others are otherwise unknown (the sacrifice to the waters). For an interpretation of these descriptions, it is necessary to compare the rituals with those from Vedic India. This necessarily brings with it a certain imbalance, because the Vedic rituals are known in astonishing detail. The elaborate descriptions of Vedic rituals in the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Śrautasūtras* undoubtedly reflect an evolved tradition rather than a transcript of early Vedic ritual. But the evolution of Vedic rituals is largely an elaboration of a set of rituals that were common to Indians and Iranians: the tending of fire, libations, animal sacrifice, rites of purification. A cautious use of the Vedic materials may therefore help in interpreting Strabo's description of the Cappadocian rituals. Another source of comparative materials that has been fruitfully explored is the terminology of sacrifice in Armenian literature.[13] Finally, the Iranian ritual injunctions and practices themselves are of course our most important source of comparison, although they are disparate and difficult to interpret without the use of comparative materials.

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[12] Strabo's descriptions of Zoroastrian rituals are discussed in Moulton, *EZ*, 407-410; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 140-148; Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 50-68; *HZ* III, 294-297.

2. *Translation*

13. The Persian customs are the same for these peoples (just mentioned) and the Medes and various other peoples; many authors have made statements about these peoples, but we too must tell the relevant things. Now, the Persians do not erect statues and altars, but they offer sacrifice on an exalted place, regarding the heaven as Zeus. And they also worship the Sun, whom they call Mithres, and the Moon and Aphrodite, and fire and the earth and the winds and water. And they perform sacrifices after dedicatory prayers in a purified place, presenting the victim wreathed. And when the Magus, who directs the ceremony, has cut the meat to pieces, the people take them away and depart, leaving no portion for the gods. For they say that the god needs the soul of the victim and nothing else. And yet, according to some, they put a small piece of the *omentum* on the fire.

14. They bring sacrifices to fire and water in a different way. For fire, they place upon it dry pieces of wood without the bark

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[13] E. Benveniste, 'Sur la terminologie iranienne du sacrifice', *JA* 252 (1964), 45-58.

and place soft fat upon it; then, they pour oil upon it and light it below, not blowing but fanning; they even kill those who do blow or put a corpse or filth upon the fire. But for water, they go to a lake or a river or a spring, dig a trench and sacrifice (the victim) over it, taking care that nothing of the water near by is soiled with blood, because thus they will defile it. Then they arrange the pieces of meat on myrtle or laurel, the Magi touch it with slender wands and sing invocations, while pouring out a libation of oil with milk and honey, not into fire or water, but upon the ground. And they sing invocations for a long time, holding the bundle of slender tamarisk wands in their hand.

15. But in Cappadocia—for there the tribe of the Magi is large; they are also called fire-kindlers; and there are many sanctuaries of the Persian gods—they do not even sacrifice with a knife, but they beat (the animal to death) with a piece of wood as with a cudgel. And there are fire-sanctuaries, noteworthy enclosures; in the midst of these is an altar, on which there is a large quantity of ashes, and (where) the Magi keep the fire ever burning. And every day, they enter and sing invocations for approximately an hour, holding the bundle of wands before the fire, wearing felt tiaras which fall down on both sides over the cheeks to cover the lips. The same customs are observed in the sanctuaries of Anaïtis and Omanos; these also have enclosures, and the image of Omanos is carried around in a procession. These things we have seen ourselves, but the other things and those which follow are recorded in the histories.

3. *Commentary*

The Persian customs are the same for these peoples (just mentioned) and the Medes and various other peoples; many authors have made statements about these peoples, but we too must tell the relevant things.

This short introductory sentence on the Persian customs is interesting for the awareness it shows of the fact that many peoples shared the same religion. Apart from the Medes, however, Strabo does not indicate which are the peoples who have the same customs as the Persians. In 11.14.16, he does mention the fact that the Armenians also practise the same religion, but on the other Iranian peoples he either remains silent, or fails to mention the religion current among them. A better indication of the awareness of shared religious tradition among almost all Iranian peoples in antiquity is furnished by Pseudo-Lucian, who has recorded the presence of Magi among the Persians, the Parthians, the Bactrians, the Chorasmians, the Aryans, the Sakas, the Medes and "many other barbarians."[14]

Now, the Persians do not erect statues and altars, but they offer sacrifice on an exalted place, regarding the heaven as Zeus. And they also worship the Sun, whom they call Mithres, and the Moon and Aphrodite, and fire and the earth and the winds and water.

In this passage, Strabo paraphrases the *locus classicus* on the religion of the Persians we have encountered in the *Histories* of Herodotus. It is unknown if Strabo really used Herodotus' text, if they both used a common source (e.g. Hecataeus) or if there is an additional source between Herodotus and Strabo. It remains useful, however, to compare the two representations of the religion of the Persians. There are some interesting questions with regard to this paraphrase, for it has been composed almost five centuries after the *Histories*. Strabo follows Herodotus with regard to the Persian religion in Iran, but there are some significant differences: the most obvious mistakes or half-truths Herodotus had left as a legacy for educated Greeks do not return in Strabo's description. Strabo was a native of Pontus, an area where the Iranians had left a strong impact,[15] and therefore had some important advantages over Herodotus: he knew the religion of the Persians. This passage of Strabo's *Geography*, therefore, is mainly interesting for the differences with Herodotus' text. Whether these differences are adjustments of Herodotus or Strabo's source remains unclear; there is a certain danger in seeking to point to adjustments or corrections in every minute deviation from Herodotus' text.

The first difference between Strabo and Herodotus, is the fact that Strabo upholds Herodotus' statement that the Persians did not make statues and altars, but does not state that the Persians did not build temples. Elsewhere, he does in fact refer to sanctuaries, altars and statues among the Cappadocian Zoroastrians.[16]

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[14] Pseudo-Lucian, *Macrobii* 4.

[15] McGing, *Foreign Policy*, 10-11; C. Marek, *Stadt, Ära und Territorium in Pontus-Bithynia und Nord-Galatia* (IstForsch 39), Tübingen 1993, 13-25.

The following statement, that the Persians sacrifice on an exalted place, recalls Herodotus' remark that the Persians sacrifice on "the highest summits of the mountains." Strabo mentions the existence of artificial mounds or raised hills as cult centres for the Persians of Asia Minor (11.8.4). His observation—that sacrifices were conducted on a high place—can only be confirmed by comparing it with modern practices, but basically seems to be correct.[17] The interpretation of the practice—as in Herodotus—that the Persians think the heaven to be Zeus, is only interesting for the fact that it has been retained.

The list of deities worshipped has some interesting points. First of all, Strabo gives Mithra his rightful place among the important divinities: as the first divinity who is worshipped, Strabo mentions "the sun, whom they call Mithres," thereby not only improving on Herodotus' omission of this popular Persian divinity, but also correcting his mistake: Mithres is the Sun and not to be connected with Aphrodite. The relation between Mithra and the Sun in the Zoroastrian tradition has been referred to briefly in ch. 3.1.3. The sun as a separate divinity (*Hvar Xšaēta*) was indeed worshipped and did receive sacrifices and prayers,[18] but the simple fact that the word Mithra in its Middle Persian form *mihr* came to mean "sun", shows that the connection between the two was very close. This double relation, Mithra being the Sun and not being the Sun at the same time, is also clear from the evidence from Roman Mithraism, where Mithras was invoked as the Sun, but also frequently represented as being distinct from it.

In the Greek tradition, which was Strabo's main source of information, Mithras and the sun are not or barely distinguished. It is, however, difficult to find these traditions in writings predating the *Geography*. Some authors do mention the name Mithra[19] and even more speak of the sun, but the direct and literal identification of Mithra with the sun appears for the first time in

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[16] Sanctuaries: 11.8.4; 12.3.37; 15.3.15; 16.1.4; statues: a.o. 11.8.4; altars: a.o. 15.3.15.

[17] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 241-250; cf. ch. 3.1.3.

[18] Although mainly in combination with Mithra; thus the prayers for Mithra (Ny. 2) and for the Sun (Ny. 1) are *always* recited in combination.

[19] Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131 (?); Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4.24; *Cyropaedia* 7.5.5; Duris of Samos, in Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 10.45.434.

Strabo's *Geography*[20] and has been a fixed part of the Greek and Latin sources ever since (cf. ch. 4.1.4).

The worship of the moon, fire, earth and water is similar to Herodotus; Strabo simply lists Aphrodite as one of the divinities worshipped in this list. This is in a way remarkable, for he apparently does not equate Aphrodite with Anāhitā, whose cult is described by him in detail. Strabo frequently mentions Anāhitā (*Geography* 11.8.4; 11.14.16; 12.3.37 etc.), but he is one of the few Classical authors who does not identify her with a Greek goddess. On the whole, Strabo rarely uses *interpretationes graecae* with regard to Iranian divinities. He usually prefers to give the names of the divinities as they are worshipped. The mention of Aphrodite in the list of worshipped divinities is therefore surprising and can be taken as an indication of the fact that Strabo did not understand the information that the Persians worship Aphrodite from Herodotus or another source. This is not as strange as it may seem, for the equation of Anāhitā with Aphrodite mainly belongs to much earlier writers (Herodotus, Berossos), whereas in later times she is most regularly called the Persian Artemis.[21]

And they perform sacrifices after dedicatory prayers in a purified place, presenting the victim wreathed. And when the Magus, who directs the ceremony, has cut the meat to pieces, the people take them away and depart, leaving no portion for the gods.

Strabo's short description of sacrificial rituals among the Persians also roughly resembles Herodotus' account. There are, however, some significant differences. Some of these are lexical (for instance the difference between Herodotus' χῶρον καθαρόν and Strabo's καθαρῷ τόπῳ), but others give the impression of being changes in interpretation.

Contrary to what Herodotus had to say on the subject, Strabo stresses the fact that the animal was wreathed. This is an aspect of sacrificial rituals that is still current today and Strabo may well have preserved the earliest reference to the practice.[22]

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[20] One can think of one possible exception: Herodotus writes that lepers are cast out of the village, because they are thought to have sinned against the Sun (*Histories* 1.138). This probably corresponds to the Avestan category of sinners *miθrō.druj-*, "he who has lied/sinned against Mithra," but Herodotus was undoubtedly unaware of such a connection.

[21] E.g. Diodorus Siculus 17.114; Plutarch, *Lucullus* 24; *Artaxerxes* 27; Pausanias 7.6.6.

[22] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 245: "It was usual to adorn the sacrificial beast with

An important difference with Herodotus is the mention of the Magus as leader (ὑφηγούμενος) of the ritual. The sacrifice described by Herodotus appeared to be a lay sacrifice: the dedicant presumably killed the victim. The Magus, who had to be present, only came in action to recite the appropriate text. Strabo, however, describes the function of the Magus as liturgical specialist *and* as overseer and leader of the ritual. Similarly, Strabo describes that it is the Magus who cuts the meat.

Little is known of the practicalities of Iranian sacrifice, be it in a lay context or in a priestly context. It is unclear, for instance, whether priests always killed the sacrificial animal, or whether there were specialised functionaries (comparable to the Greek *mageiros*[23] or the Indian *śamitṛ*)[24] to kill and dissect the animal.[25] It appears, however, that the Iranian Zoroastrians only recently resorted to a layman killing the animal because of a shortage of priests.[26]

For they say that the god needs the soul of the victim and nothing else. And yet, according to some, they put a small piece of the omentum on the fire.

From this passage onwards, Strabo's account of the rituals of the Persians has nothing in common with Herodotus' bland description. It is difficult to find the exact background of Strabo's observations, which is only mentioned later by means of the word ἑωϱάϰαμεν, "I have seen" (13.3.15), but from this passage onwards, Strabo's information is so unique and so precise that it seems fair to assume that he has put his personal observations to use. The only possible indication that this is indeed the case, and that Strabo, departing from what "many have spoken" (15.3.13) or what has been recorded "in the histories" (15.3.15) starts using his own information, is the sudden appearance of alternative informants by the introduction of "they say" (φασι) and "as some

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coloured ribands or a kerchief [...] tied round its horns or neck." This, however, is different from the Greek wreath, which was a flower garland.

[23] G. Berthiaume, *Les rôles du mageiros. Etudes sur la boucherie, la cuisine et le sacrifice dans la Grèce ancienne* (Mnemosyne Suppl. 70), Leiden 1982.

[24] For the Vedic and later Indian animal sacrifice (*paśubandha*), cf. R.N. Dandekar (ed.), *Śrautakośa*, vol. I, Poona 1962, 770-876, with pertinent remarks on the śamitṛ on pp. 817-820 (from the *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra*).

[25] Note, however, that in India, where there is a specialised slaughterer, it is the priest who instructs the *śamitṛ* how to dissect the animal.

[26] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 245.

say" (ὥς λέγουσί τινες) in these two short phrases.

There is much evidence for the fact that animals are thought to have a "soul" in the Zoroastrian tradition. This is clear, for instance, from the common Middle Persian word for animal, *gyānwar*, "animate being" (cf. Gk. ἔμψυχον) and from several Pahlavi texts.[27] It is also clear from some passages in the Avesta in which the animals are said to have a soul (Av. *uruuan-*).[28] In many other passages animals are credited with "consciousness" (Av. *baoδah-*) and "life" (*uštāna-*). The word *baoδa(h)-* seems to be of special importance in this ritual context. There appear to have existed two different words, *baoδa-*, "scent" and *baoδah-*, "consciousness;" they are both used to express a constituent part of living beings that is released after their death. Thus, "the righteous purifier, after his death the unrighteous evil-knowing daēvas are frightened by his scent"[29] and when a dog dies, its consciousness "passes to the water-springs, and there from these come together two otters, from a thousand female dogs and a thousand male dogs a pair, female and male."[30]

In the later ritual practice, the word *bōy* (the Middle Persian rendering of both *baoδa-* and *baoδah-*) is applied to the pleasing essence of the sacrifice, of which the divine world partakes. The divinities partake only of an otherwise undetectable element of the killed victim. Strabo renders it as ψυχή, a word also denoting "essence" or "consciousness" as well as "soul".[31] That this is already an ancient idea in Zoroastrianism is clear from an Avestan fragment in *Pursišnīhā* 33: "We send forth, O beneficent, good-giving bull, thy conscience and soul among the nearest created lights, the sight of the eyes of man."[32]

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[27] For example *Andarz ī wehdēnān ō māzdēsnān*, PhlT 123.3ff: *Pursīd kū andar xrafstarān gyān kē kard? Guft hād Ōhrmazd*: "He asked: 'Who created the soul in the xrafstars (the evil animals)?' He said: 'Ōhrmazd.'" Thus, even evil creatures possess a soul.

[28] E.g. Y. 39.1-2 (from the ancient *YH*), where a distinction is made between the souls of the domestic and of the wild animals; cf. Narten, *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, 252-255); Yt. 13.74 (where a soul is attributed to all living creatures, tame, wild, flying, creeping etc.).

[29] *yaoždāθriiō aṣ̌auua pasca para.iristīm daēuua druuaṇtō duždåŋhō baoδəm [...] fratərəsəṇti* (Vd. 19.33).

[30] *xå paiti apąm parāiti [...] aθra åŋhąm hąm.bauuaiṇti duua udra upāpa hazaŋrāiš sūnīš strī.nāmanō hazaŋrāiš sūnīš nairiiō.nāmanō miθβana strica nairiiasca* (Vd. 13.51).

[31] For an Indo-Iranian interpretation of Strabo's passage—a.o. in the light of the current ritual practice—cf. *HZ* I, 162-163; cf. also J. Kellens & E. Pirart, *Les textes vieil-avestiques* I, Wiesbaden 1988, 34. The early Greeks only rarely attributed a soul to animals: J.N. Bremmer, *The early Greek Concept of the Soul*, Princeton 1993^4, 126-128. In later periods, there are many speculations on animal psychology, often in connection with (opposition to) animal sacrifice. For an overview, cf. U. Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch im Denken der Antike. Studien zur Tierpsychologie, Anthropologie und Ethik* (Studien zur antiken Philosophie 6), Amsterdam 1977.

The offering of (a small part of) the omentum is an ancient Indo-Iranian heritage that was also noted, a generation before Strabo, by Catullus, who wrote that the Magus "melts the fatty omentum in the fire."[33] Unfortunately, little is known on Iranian ritual terminology; there are no clear textual references to the omentum. In the immeasurably more substantial Indian ritual texts (especially the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Śrautasūtras*), there are very specific indications of what is to be done with the sacrificial animal, but these texts reflect an evolved ritual tradition, which had developed in different directions. Therefore, the correspondences between the Indian texts, Strabo's brief mention and what little is left of Iranian references to the omentum-offering, must be treated with the necessary caution. What complicates matters further is the fact that in the contemporary animal sacrifices, the fat used for the oblation to fire, is taken from the sheep's tail,[34] whereas parts of the intestines (including a piece of the omentum) are strung together on a piece of gut and not offered to fire (the so-called *andom*).[35]

The Indian ritual of the omentum-offering (*vapāhuti*) is an important part of the rites of animal sacrifice (*paśubandha*). After the animal has been killed by the *śamitṛ*, the priest gives directions to cut out the omentum (*vapā-*), which is put on a two-pronged fork (*vapāśravaṇī-*) and "roasted" on the fire. The ritual directions for the roasting of the omentum suggest that it does not melt instantaneously.[36] What Strabo refers to, appears to be a similar practice. Since the Iranians had an absolute ban on the burning of dead matter, it is likely that only those portions of the omentum were offered that consisted of pure fat, would melt completely and thereby sustain the fire. This ritual is referred to in Iran as *ātaš-zōhr*, "libation to fire;" in the *ātaš-zōhr*, fat, wood and incense are offered to the fire.[37] In view of Strabo's exact reference, it seems fair to assume that the Iranians of old used the (traditional) omentum as a source for the fat-offering. There is a clear reference to the offering of animal fat in Vd. 18.70: "He shall slaughter a thousand sheep and of all these he shall offer—as libations to fire—the *afsmaniuua* in a righteous and good manner."[38] The word used for the entrails (?) offered, *afsmaniuua-*, is of unknown meaning, but it has been suggested that it refers to the *andom* mentioned above.[39] The word is glossed in the Pahlavi Vendidād *ad locum* as *yaṯ antarə vərəδka as marəja*, "that which is between the kidneys, that is the *marəja*." This gloss does show that it is indeed part of the intestines of the animal, but the word *marəja-* is again of unknown meaning. It is possible that it signifies the omentum, but this is obviously impossible to prove.[40]

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[32] *para tē gaospəṇta gaohudå baoδasca uruuānəmca fraēš́iiāmahi nazdišta upaθβaršta raocå narš cašmanå sūkəm*. Cf. K.M. JamaspAsa & H. Humbach, *Pursišnīhā. A Zoroastrian Catechism* I, Wiesbaden 1971, 52-53; J. Kellens, 'Die Religion der Achämeniden', *AoF* 10 (1983), 107-123, p. 118.

[33] *omentum in flamma pingue liquefaciens*: *Carmen* 90.

[34] For the fat-offering to fire, cf. M. Boyce, 'Ātaš-zōhr and Āb-zōhr', *JRAS* 1966, 100-118.

[35] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 158; 'Ātaš-zōhr', 107-108.

[36] For a brief overview of the *paśubandha*, cf. A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Westport 1971², 324-326; for an elaborate description of the omentum-offering, *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra* 4.6-7, translated in *Śrautakośa* I.2, 817-820.

It is clear, however, that animal fat was used (as it still is) in certain rituals as an oblation to fire. The various Avestan words referring to this oblation fail to specify whether it is always the omentum that is used in these fat offerings, but Strabo's and Catullus' rather exact knowledge and the abundant Indian parallels at least suggest that such was indeed the commonest ritual practice.

They bring sacrifices to fire and water in a different way. For fire, they place upon it dry pieces of wood without the bark and place soft fat upon it; then, they pour oil upon it and light it below, not blowing but fanning; they even kill those who do blow or put a corpse or filth upon the fire.

The fact that Strabo mentions that the offerings to fire and to water differ, gives the impression of being a fair rendering of the *ātaš-zōhr* and the *āb-zōhr*, the libation to fire and the libation to water. As we shall see, however, the offering to water is an animal sacrifice, which is distinct from the Zoroastrian *āb-zōhr*.

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[37] Boyce, 'Ātaš-zōhr', *passim*.

[38] *hazaŋrəm anumaiianąm frāuuinuiiāṯ vīspanąmca aētaēšąm afsmaniuuå zaoθra aθre aṣ̌aiia vaŋhuiia frabarōiṯ*.

[39] Boyce, 'Ātaš-zōhr', 108 with nn. 8-12. For the words *afsman-* and *afsmaniuuąn*, cf. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, 80.

[40] A connection with the verb *marz-*, "to wipe, clean" (Skt *mr̥j-*, NP *māl-īdan*, Oss *mælz-* etc.), is likely, but again difficult to establish. If the connection is sound, the word may indicate "the pure part," that is that part of the animal which is fit for sacrifice. The root *mr̥j-* is often used in connection with the omentum (*vapā-*) in Sanskrit: cf. G. Thite, 'Vapāmārjana in the Śrauta Texts', *ArOr* 46 (1978), 338-340, for a discussion.

Strabo first describes the offering to fire. For the actual fire, "dry pieces of wood without the bark" (ξηϱὰ ξύλα τοῦ λέπους χωϱίς) are used. This is a very accurate observation, combining several well-known prescriptions for the use of wood in the Zoroastrian texts.

First of all, the wood (Av. *aēsma-*) must be dry. This is clearly stated in many texts, e.g. Y. 62.10, "This is the blessing of fire (for him) who brings to it dry wood selected for its brightness, purified according to the rules of righteousness"[41] or A. 3.5: "Then bring loads and even larger quantities of dried, selected firewood to the house of the Ratu".[42] Similar injunctions can be found in Pahlavi and Persian Zoroastrian books.[43]

Strabo also mentions the fact that only pieces of wood without bark are used. This is a known feature from current Zoroastrian usage[44] and is known from several Persian Zoroastrian texts in secular contexts such as the cutting of a toothpick.[45] The Avestan texts merely speak of "purified, properly prepared" (*yaoždāta-*, Vd. 18.19), or of "hard, dry, selected" (*xraožduua-*, *hušata-*, *pairīšta-*, Vd. 14.2) wood. There also is a curious passage in Vd. 5.2; it is part of a question if wood from a tree may be used, when a bird that has eaten pieces from a corpse has vomited or defecated on it: "A man goes there from the valleys of the streams to the heights of the mountains. He goes to that tree, on which the bird (is sitting, and) wants (to cut) wood for the fire. He fells it, he cuts it, he chops it up, he lights it with the fire, the son of Ahura Mazdā; what is his penalty?"[46] The answer is that there is no penalty for the man. This text may imply the use of the wood *in toto*, but that is not necessary; certain pollutions did in fact make wood—with or without the bark—unsuitable as fuel for the sacred fire.[47] The enormous stress on the proper (triple) inspection of the fire wood (*PhlRDd.* 37a2), may suggest that all wood was stripped of its bark, but the textual evidence is far from conclusive.

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[41] *imat̰ āθrō āfriuuanəm yō ahmāi aēsməm baraiti hikūš raocas.pairīštą ašahe bərəja yaoždātą.*

[42] *aēsmanąmcit̰ āat̰ hušatąm pairīštanąm vaziiāiš stāišca staoiiəbīš ratəuš nmānəm frānāšaiiata.*

[43] E.g. PhlRDd 37b19: "If damp wood is put on (the fire) or meat is roasted on bricks, every time it is one *owirišt* sin (which is) one drachm" (trl. Williams). SDB 79: *hēzom tar nabāyad sūxtan*, "moist wood must not be burnt." Notice also the interesting story in *AWN* 10: although Ardā Wīrāz has tried very hard only to use very dry wood, Ātar, lord of Fire, shows him in paradise a tank filled with water that has come out of the wood Ardā Wīrāz has burnt: cf. Benveniste, 'Le témoignage de Théodore bar Kōnay', 200-201.

[44] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 74-75.

[45] *SDN* 17: *īnke cūn xelāl tarāšand yā cūbī dar bon-e dandān x^{v}āhand kardan bāyad ke pūst nadārad ke agar pūst andak māyeh bar-ān bovad cūn dar dandān konand va beyafganand agar zan-e ābestan pāy bar ān nehad bīm ān bovad ke kūdak be-zīyān āyad*. "This: that when they cut a toothpick or want to insert a piece of wood between the teeth, it may not have any bark, for if it has even a small piece of bark on it, when they apply it to their teeth and throw it away, if a pregnant woman steps on it, it must be feared that the child will suffer damage."

On top of the wood, soft fat (πιμελή) is placed. It is tempting to think that this soft fat is identical with the part of the omentum. This, however, is difficult to ascertain. The two words, ἐπίπλοον and πιμελή, are frequently connected in Greek. Herodotus (*Histories* 2.47) mentions a sacrifice of swine to the Egyptian moon (Isis?)[48] in which several intestines (including the omentum) are bound together "in the soft fat that is found around the stomach," thus distinguishing explicitly between the omentum and the soft fat. Aristotle, however, specifies that the omentum "is a membrane of a fatty (πιμελώδης) nature" (*History of Animals* 495B29-30). The difference between πιμελή (soft fat) and στέαρ (hard fat) is that the former is "liquid and not capable of being solidified" (χυτὸν καὶ ἄπηκτον, *History of Animals* 520A7-9), that it "does not become solid and does not crumble when it is dried" (οὐ πήγνυται οὐδὲ θρύπτεται ξηραιομένη, *Parts of Animals* 651A36-37). The fatty substance can thus have been part of the omentum, but it can also have been taken from other parts of the soft intestines.

The fire is lit from underneath. This probably refers to the fact that the new wood and the fat are set aflame with the existing (smothering) fire.[49] That they pour oil on the fire has also been recorded by Appian.[50] It is not a known part of rituals from living

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[46] *nā taṯ frašusaiti haca jąfnauuō raonąm auui barəšnauuō gairinąm upa tąm vanąm aēiti yąm hō mərəγō āθre aēsmąn išaiti. auui dim janaiti auui dim θβərəsaiti auui dim tāšti auui dim aiβi.raocaiieiti āθrō ahurahe mazdå puθrəm kā he asti ciθa.*

[47] Cf. *SDN* 88, specifying wood that is used for the carrying or washing of the dead, wood polluted by blood or other filth, by the bare touch of a menstruating woman, and wood used to hang a man.

[48] Thus Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II, ad locum.*

[49] Compare the fire miracle observed by Pausanias 5.27.6.

[50] *Mithridateia* 66.

Zoroastrian practice and it is also absent from the Avesta and Pahlavi sources.[51] There is a possible trace of what was meant by Strabo on an Achaemenian seal.[52] This seal bears the only representation of the *ātaš-zōhr* known from the Achaemenian period and one of the very few known from ancient Iran as a whole.[53] The seal, bearing the remarkable inscription *zrtwštrš*, "Zoroastrian," shows two priests facing a sacred fire (in the typical three-stepped fire altar), wearing the tiara and the *paitidāna*. Above the fire, the figure in the winged disk hovers. One of the priests holds the *baresman* in his hands, whereas the other one is pouring something into the fire with a ladle with a cupped ending that is held above the fire and emptied onto it. Whatever it is the priest is pouring out must have been a liquid substance (that can be poured from a ladle) that sustains fire. Melted fat or butter (cf. Yt. 12.3) seem to be good options. If these substances are heated in the flames and then poured out, they may be interpreted as oil by a Greek observer accustomed to libations of oil.[54]

Strabo also mentions the fact that the Persians do not blow into the fire, but use a fan (οὐ φυσῶντες ἀλλὰ ῥιπίζοντες). That it is not allowed to blow into the fire, is a consistent element in all Zoroastrian traditions. As Strabo notices further on in his descriptions, the priests tending the fire have a piece of cloth or leather before their mouth (the so-called *paitidāna-*) to prevent their breath from polluting the fire. In Pahlavi literature, the ban on breathing into fire is explicit.[55] The use of a fan has also been attested. In a list of priestly utensils for the fire-cult in Vd. 14.7, mention is made of the *ātrəuuazana-* (PhlVd. *ātaxš-wāzēnīdār*), a word that either means "a pair of bellows" or a "fan." The Pahlavi word *damēnag*, "fan," is also sometimes used in a ritual meaning.[56] In secular usage, such as the fire of a blacksmith, the use of a pair of bellows was compulsory.[57]

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[51] *HZ* III, 294-296.

[52] P. Bordreuil, *Catalogue des sceaux Ouest-sémitiques inscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale, du Musée du Louvre et du Musée biblique de Bible et Terre Sainte*, Paris 1986, no. 136.

[53] The commentary of F. Grenet on the seal in Bordreuil's catalogue, mentions just one other representation of the *ātaš-zōhr*, on a Soghdian ossuary from Kirghizia, published in V.M. Ploskikh, *Istorija Kirgizskoj SSR*, vol. 1, Frunze 1984, facing p. 225. There, however, the *ātaš-zōhr* appears to be performed by *two* priests at the same time, performing different functions, but both engaged in the tending of the fire.

[54] Burkert, *GR*, 70-72; the oil, however, was not poured onto the fire by the Greeks.

[55] *PhlRDd* 37a3 (trl. Williams): "He who sits near it should not then utter a word before the fire, and if he does speak then he should hold something in front of his mouth and nose so that *the breath which comes out of his mouth and nose does not reach the fire."

Whoever does blow on the fire and thereby pollutes it, or puts (part of) a corpse or dung on it, is killed. The word Strabo uses for dung, βόλβιτον, means "cow-dung" and this specification may have been inspired by the general practice of using cow-dung as a fuel for the hearth fire (thus presenting a source of amazement to Strabo),[58] or otherwise may be extended in meaning to a general term referring to filth. The combination "corpse" and "filth" or "dung" recalls the Zoroastrian combination of *nasu-/ nasā* (corpse or solid dead matter such as nails) and *hixra-/hixr* (that which leaves the body, such as blood, semen, pus, urine etc.). Of these two concepts, *hixra-* is only mentioned twice in the Avesta (Vd. 5.14; 5.16), together with *nasu-* and the *daxma-* (place where the body is laid). In the Pahlavi books, however, *nasā* and *hixr* are mentioned very often, especially in connection with fire and water. Relevant texts can for instance be found in the second *Patēt Pašēmānīg*, confession of guilt, which is a part of the *ZXA*, and therefore may be a translation of a lost Avestan text.[59] The confession texts usually contain enumerations and classifications of sins; thus in the second *Patēt* 3.1, the category of *margarzān* (mortal) sins includes whoever is "polluted with dead matter, cooks dead matter on a fire, throws dead matter into water and fire or conceals dead matter under the earth." The *margarzān* trespasser is "worthy of death, that is he must be killed."[60] The killing of such a sinner can also be found in the Avesta, Vd. 8.73-74: "'When these, that is the Mazda-worshippers, going on foot or running, riding or driving, should come upon a fire used to cook corpses—they would be cooking a corpse, they would be roasting a corpse—what should they, the Mazda-worshippers, do?' Then Ahura Mazdā said: 'may you kill that corpse-cooker, may they strike him down, may they bring down that pot, may they bring down that structure.'"[61] The killing of *margarzān*-sinners is attested for the Sasanian period. The punishment for *margarzān* sinners is specified as decapitation.[62] There are several passages, however, which suggest that *margarzān*-sinners were not all executed, but that other ways of atoning for such a sin existed (e.g. H. 12.4; N. 11.2).

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[56] Cf. F.M. Kotwal, 'An Ancient Irani Ritual for tending the Fire', in: *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* (AI 25), Leiden 1985, 365-370, pp. 368-369, n. 8; the word also occurs as a loan-word in Aram *dmynqy*, apparently used to refer to a fire-pan used to carry coals to the fire-temple. The word is discussed at length in E.S. Rosenthal, 'For the Talmudic Dictionary — Talmudica Iranica' in: S. Shaked (ed.), *Irano-Judaica* I (1982), 38-134, pp. 32f.; 82f. with nn. 108-109 (in Hebrew; *non vidi*). Cf. also R. Brody, 'Judaism in the Sasanian Empire: A Case Study in Religious Coexistence', in: Shaked & Netzer (eds.), *Irano-Judaica* II (1990), 52-62, pp. 57-58.

[57] *PhlRDd* 18d13: "Sixth (is) that, when they pour upon me dirty metal for blacksmith's work, and they blow me with their mouths, not with bellows, and grudgingly and unwillingly I shall (have to) heat that metal." (trl. Williams)

[58] As was customary in Armenia. Cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 491-493 and n. 55 on p. 509 (referring to Ełišē).

[59] The only indication of the actual Avestan text of this confession of guilt is found in a gloss accompanying *PhlVd*. 7.52. All surviving examples of the *Patita*, however, are extremely late, and possibly Pahlavi retranscriptions of Pāzand texts. For an evaluation, cf. J.P. Asmussen, *X^{v}āstvānīft. Studies in Manichaeism* (Acta Theologica Danica), Copenhagen 1965, 26-112.

But for water, they go to a lake or a river or a spring, dig a trench and sacrifice (the victim) over it, taking care that nothing of the water near by is soiled with blood, because thus they will defile it.

Strabo proceeds with a description of an animal sacrifice to water, a ritual which has disappeared from current practice for which there is hardly any indication in the surviving Zoroastrian literature. We therefore have to depend largely on Strabo's accuracy and can only compare it with more general rules of purity and sacrifice. It is possible that the description of the ritual originates in a misunderstanding of several distinct rituals, or that Strabo's interpretation was influenced by what he considered a normal sacrifice. Nevertheless, his description is very precise and deserves careful attention.

The worship of rivers, streams etc. is well known from all varieties of Zoroastrianism. In the Avesta, several rivers are mentioned as recipients of worship (Yt. 1.21; Vd. 19.2), the waters collectively are frequently invoked and water has several prominent divinities as its guardian divinities (Apąm Napāt, Anāhitā, Haurvatāt). The passages mentioning the collective divinity "the

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[60] Dhabhar, *TrlZXA*, 131.

[61] *yat̰ aēte yōi mazdaiiasna pāδa aiiaṇtəm vā taciṇtəm vā barəmnəm vā vazəmnəm vạ̄ ātrəm nasupākəm frajasąn nasūm hąm.pacąn nasūm hāuuaiąn kuθa tē vərəziiąn aēte yōi mazdaiiasna. āat̰ mraot̰ ahurō mazdå auua aētəm nasupākəm janaēta auua hē janaiiən apa aētąm dištąm baraiiən apa aētəm uzdānəm baraiiən.*

[62] DkM. 704.11-16.; *MHD* 15.1; cf. Macuch, *Rechtskasuistik*, 50 (with commentary on the *Dk*. passage); 129, 132.

Waters" (the *Āpas*) are important for an evaluation of what Strabo means with his sacrifice to water. They are worshipped collectively (Y. 1.12; 2.12 etc.); this worship of the waters is considered an important element of the Zoroastrian duties, as is clear from Vd. 18.9: the dangers brought about by the daēva *Maršauuan-* ("Who brings about forgetfulness") include the ceasing of the reciting of the Gāthās and the worship of the waters, two essential elements of Zoroastrian practices.

The sacrifice to water is performed near a source of living water, a lake, a river or a well. In Strabo's description of the sacrifice, the victim is killed in a trench or hole near the source of water, in order to prevent its blood from polluting the water. In 15.3.16, Strabo mentions similar care for water: the Persians do not throw anything they consider unclean (μυσαρός) into a river.

The word Strabo uses for the killing of the victim, σφαγιάζομαι, belongs to a complex of words that indicate the killing of the victim by slitting its throat with a knife.[63] In the following section, Strabo also implies that the killing of the victim with a knife or a dagger (μάχαιρα) is the norm. As much as this reflects known current Zoroastrian practice, it is generally thought that in ancient Zoroastrianism the animal was never killed by slitting its throat.[64] Strabo's descriptions, however, may provide some reasons to reconsider this position.

Then they arrange the pieces of meat on myrtle or laurel, the Magi touch it with slender wands and sing invocations, while pouring out a libation of oil with milk and honey, not into fire or water, but upon the ground.

Strabo omits a description of the cutting of the victim and the cooking of the meat, but simply introduces the pieces of meat (τὰ κρέα) that are put on myrtle or laurel leaves (ἐπὶ μυρρίνην ἢ δάφνην). The use of myrtle was also noticed by Herodotus and is known from current ritual practice. The use of laurel leaves is unknown from Iranian sources. The myrtle and laurel leaves were presumably used to make the sacrificial mound discussed in ch. 3.1.3. Herodotus specifies the herbs used for the mound as trefoil.

Although the following sentence is difficult to interpret, what is implied is that the Magi touch the meat with some small sticks. This refers to the *baresman* (Phl. *barsom*), the bundle of sacred twigs, which is described in greater detail below. The reference to the songs the Magi sing or the invocations they make, reflects the central position of the recitation of texts in Zoroastrian rituals (for which, cf. ch. 4.6.3).

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[63] LSJ s.vv. σφαγή, σφάγιον, σφαγίς and σφάζω.

[64] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 244-245.

The actual libation has been a common source of confusion for Strabo's modern interpreters. Strabo speaks of a libation of oil, mixed with milk and honey; two of these elements, the oil and the honey are *never* used in Zoroastrian rituals. Clemen suggested an interpretation based on the fact that Soma in the Indian texts is called *madhu-*, "honey" and that Haoma is called "yellow" (*zāri-*, Y. 10.21) in the Avesta. He suggested that the honey could be interpreted as (yellow) Haoma; otherwise, the local Zoroastrians could have begun to replace the Haoma with the mixture Strabo describes, because the plant itself did not grow in their surroundings.[65] Benveniste, guided by his idea that Strabo described a degenerate Mazdeism, considers it "quite obvious that these practices are not Zoro[a]strian" and suggests a borrowing from the Babylonian cult, for in the Babylonian *akītu* festival, a libation of milk, oil and honey is prepared. He also refers to Appian, *Mithridateia* 66.[66] Appian, speaking of a sacrifice performed by Mithridates to Zeus Stratios as an ancestral offering, mentions libations of milk, honey, wine, oil and incense. Boyce and Grenet simply note that honey and oil are unknown from Zoroastrian rituals and that especially honey—being the product of an evil creature, the bee—was unimaginable in these rituals.[67]

To understand the libation, we would have to know several things: what, in Strabo's mind, constituted a normal libation, what was used in Iranian libations and what was never used. There are some clues to these questions. The common Greek libation consisted of water or wine, but quite frequently also of milk, honey and oil.[68] In a Persian context in Greek literature, queen Atossa brings libations of milk, honey, water, wine, oil and flowers to the shadow of the deceased Darius.[69] One could suppose, then, that Strabo identified the three elements of the libation from his own experience as a Greek or from older popular conceptions of Persians libations. This must be borne in mind if we try to find Iranian correspondences.

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[65] Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 144. Haoma is conspicuously absent from classical literature. There is, however, one possible reference to the plant: Hesychius, *Lexicon* s.v. ναῦμα· πόα τις παϱὰ Πέϱσαις, ἥν τινες πολύγονον.

[66] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 56-57.

[67] *HZ* III, 232; 293-294; 296. Cf. *PersRiv* 266 (a priest's purity is vitiated by the eating of honey); 399 (if a priest eats honey, he must undergo the great purification ritual).

[68] Cf. Burkert, *GR*, 70-73; Graf, 'Milch, Honig und Wein.'

Offerings including milk are not frequently found in the Avesta. Milk (*xšuuid-*) is sometimes mentioned in conjunction with the fat-offering (*āzūiti-*), based on Y. 29.7, where the milk, however, appears to have a non-ritual function. Only one instance in the Avesta, Vd. 7.77 speaks of the use of milk in libations; when a cow has eaten a piece of a corpse, it can be purified, but the milk (*paiiah-*) of that cow may not be used in the libation for a year. The problematic words *haoma yō gauua* in the Yašts are also frequently interpreted as referring to milk as an essential part of the sacrificial rituals.[70]

In more technical ritual literature, especially the *Nērangestān*, and in modern rituals, milk (*paiiah-*, *pēm*) has a specified and prominent place as representative of the animal kingdom (*gōšudāg*). Thus the *Nērangestān* sanctions the use of milk as the *gōšudāg*: "It is authorised with milk, both boiled and unboiled, both fat and not fat [Milk is allowed, both boiled and unboiled, both that from a fat sheep and from a weak one]."[71] In the present day rituals, the goat's milk (*jivām*) is a fixed part of the libation and other rituals.[72]

The last element of the libation, honey, has given rise to many speculations. Priests were not allowed to use or eat honey (*Pers-Riv* 399; cf. above). Bartholomae reconstructed a libation with honey in what appears to be a gloss in *Nērangestān* 57, *paēnaēniiācit̰ zaoθraiia*, "with a libation containing honey," arguing that the Middle Persian word for honey, *angubēn*, contains **paēna-*, "honey," as its second component.[73] The context of the passage, speaking of the offerings of meat, makes this interpretation dubious. The often suggested emendation *paēmaēniiācit̰*, "containing milk" is only slightly better, for the Avestan *paēman-* seems to have been reserved for human milk (in MP, however, *pēm* is used in a general meaning "milk"). In *Aog*. 15-16, there is a reference to the food that shall be eaten by the deceased soul after death, which is identified as the "spring butter" (*zarəmaiia- raoγna-*)[74] and interpreted in the Pahlavi-Pāzand translation as "water, wine, milk and honey."[75]

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[69] Aeschylus, *Persians* 607-622. Cf. Burkert, *GR*, 71; Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 89-91.

[70] For a discussion of this expression, cf. P. Thieme, 'Vorzarathustrisches bei den Zarathustriern', *ZDMG* 107 (1957), 67-104, pp. 67-77; *HZ* I, 269, n. 82.

[71] N. 57: *ratufriš paiiəbiš* x^{v}*āstāišca ax*^{v}*āstāišca azdiiāišca anazdiiāišca [radīhā pēm, ān-iz ī poxt ān ī *apoxt, ān az ān ī frabīh gōspand, ān az ān ī nizār].*

[72] Modi, *CC*, 295-296; Kotwal & Boyd, *Persian Offering*, index s.v. "goat's milk".

[73] But cf. H.W. Bailey, 'Dvārā Matīnām', *BSOAS* 20 (1957), 41-59, pp. 50-2, who argues that it is rather the first component of the word, *angu-*, that seems to refer to honey, whereas *pēn* would have a more general meaning "thick

Consequently, it is difficult to either deny or accept Strabo's description of the libation, which gives the impression of having been interpreted in the light of the Greek chthonic offerings. Strabo specifically mentions the βόθϱος, the pit associated with offerings to the chthonic gods, in which the blood is made to flow. The libation he describes consists of several elements that are associated in Aeschylus' *Persians* with offerings for the dead; it is, moreover, poured onto the earth as is customary in chthonic rituals.[76] It is this piece of information which is characteristically out of place, for the Zoroastrian libation to water is always poured into a source of water, and never on the earth. It appears, then, that Strabo interpreted his information on the Iranian sacrifice to water in the light of similar practices current among the Greeks for chthonic offerings, thereby obfuscating, through a wealth of details that cannot be sufficiently checked, the exact components of the Iranian sacrifice to the waters.

And they sing invocations for a long time, holding the bundle of slender tamarisk wands in their hand.

It is not possible to make definitive pronouncements on the nature of the invocations Strabo attributes to the Magi. What is clear, though, is the fact that the priests do so while holding the bundle of *baresman*-sticks.[77] These were originally taken from the

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liquid", which makes the word *paēnaēniiācit̰* too general for an interpretation of the passage.

[74] This is indeed the common food of the deceased souls; cf. *HN* 2, 18.36, from which the quote in *Aog*. was taken. The same passage is also found *WYt*. 64. JamaspAsa, *Aogəmadaēcā*, 57 lists several Pahlavi passages, where reference to the spring butter can be found.

[75] JamaspAsa, *Aogəmadaēcā*, 26; 57.

[76] Burkert, *GR*, 71.

[77] For the *baresman* (Middle Persian *barsōm*), cf. Thieme, 'Vorzarathustrisches', 71-75.

mound of grass used to put the sacrificial meat on, but in an early development came to be replaced by separate sticks or twigs, eventually even by small metal wires.[78] The bundle of sacred sticks is represented throughout the Iranian world on coins, reliefs and works of art; there seem to be two types on the artistic representations, one consisting of a bundle of short twigs, the other consisting of a bundle of long, thick rods. The latter type is in fact much more common, but this may be due to the fact that the short thin twigs are more difficult to represent in a recognisable way. The long rods often depicted appear to be influenced by Near Eastern examples.[79] Strabo mentions the *baresman* three times and twice specifies the sticks as being "delicate, thin" (λεπτός), which is in accordance with ritual practice from the Sasanian period (and would lessen the burden of holding the sticks represented for a long time, as specified by Strabo). The plant Strabo specifies as being used, the tamarisk (Gk μυρίκη; NP *gaz*), is also specified as a plant to be used in the *Persian Rivāyats*[80] and was apparently still used to cut the *barsom* by the Zoroastrians of Yazd early this century.[81]

The Magi sing invocations while they hold the bundle of tamarisk twigs. The word Strabo uses for the invocation, ἐπῳδή, was also used by Herodotus (ἐπαοιδή) and often has a pejorative meaning (spell, charm etc.), though not necessarily so (cf. ch. 4.6.3). The invocations take a long time, "approximately an hour," as Strabo later specifies (15.3.15). They would have been in Avestan, of course, and Strabo nowhere indicates that he understands what was being said (just as he does not mention a single item of Zoroastrian doctrine).

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[78] Such is the current practice. Kotwal & Boyd, *A Persian Offering*, contains some good photographs of the modern *barsom*.

[79] For the Near Eastern prototypes of the long rods, cf. P. Calmeyer, 'Barsombündel im 8. und 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.', in: *Wandlungen. Studien zur antiken und neueren Kunst. Ernst Homann gewidmet*, Waldsassen 1975, 11-15; *HZ* II, 38-9. Benveniste's attempt at a *non liquet* for the interpretation of the bundle of twigs as the *baresman* (*Persian Religion*, 57), rests on the interpretation of the totality of the ritual as a hybrid of Babylonian customs and is plainly wrong. For Anatolian representations of men (both priests and laymen) and gods holding the *baresman*, cf. K. Bittel, 'Ein persischer Feueraltar aus Kappadokien', in: *Satura. Früchte aus der antiken Welt. Otto Weinreich zum 13. März 1951 dargebracht*, Baden-Baden 1952, 15-29 (Bünyan); Waldmann, *Mazdaismus*, 166-167 (Commagene). For similar representations throughout the Iranian world (Persepolis, Kurdistan, the Oxus-treasure etc.), cf. *HZ* II-III, the *indices* s.v. *baresman*.

[80] *PersRiv* 418.

[81] Moulton, *EZ*, 408, n. 5.

But in Cappadocia—for there the tribe of the Magi is large; they are also called fire-kindlers; and there are many sanctuaries of the Persian gods—they do not even sacrifice with a knife, but they beat (the animal to death) with a piece of wood as with a cudgel.

For the first time in his description of the Persian rituals, Strabo mentions the source of his information: it is an eyewitness account (cf. the ἑωϱάκαμεν at the end of 15.3.15) from Cappadocia. Cappadocia is known as one of the Anatolian lands where Iranian culture and religion had a long-lasting impact.[82] A good indication for this is the evidence of the Cappadocian calendar, which was current from the Achaemenian period onwards and was still known in the 4th century CE.[83] The Cappadocian calendar is a Zoroastrian calendar, using the Zoroastrian month-names. There are several important inscriptions, in Aramaic and Greek,[84] attesting to the presence of Zoroastrians. Even comparatively late texts, such as an epistle of Basil, and the inscriptions of Kirdīr mention the presence of Zoroastrian communities in Cappadocia.[85] The most important references to Zoroastrianism in Cappadocia, however, are those given by Strabo.

Strabo begins by claiming that the tribe or clan (φῦλον)[86] of the Magi is large in Cappadocia, which we have to take seriously. They are known under the name πύϱαιθοι "fire-kindlers" (a compound of πῦϱ, "fire" and αἴθω, "to kindle"), a statement repeated by the Byzantine historian Eustathius.[87] The word is also found as the second part of the compound *dumopireti* in an inscription from Novae in Moesia Inferior.[88] The context of this inscription, however, is Anatolian.[89] The first part of the compound, Greek δοῦμος, is a rare word meaning "religious association" and it is unknown in which contexts the word was used.[90] Nevertheless, the idea that the second part of the compound represents Greek *puraithoi* certainly has its attractions. The implications of such a connection, however, are difficult to establish.

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[82] For Cappadocia in general, cf. E. Kirsten, 'Cappadocia', *RAC* 2 (1954), 861-91; extensive bibliography in F. Hild & M. Restle, *Kappadokien (Kappadokia, Charsianon, Sebasteia und Lykandos)* (Tabula Imperii Byzantini 2; Wien 1981). For the Persian religion in Cappadocia, *HZ* III, 262-281. The dynastic history is treated by R.D. Sullivan, 'The Dynasty of Cappadocia', *ANRW* II.7.2 (1980), 1125-1168.

[83] For the Cappadocian calendar, cf. A. Panaino, 'Calendars I. Pre-Islamic Calendars', *EIr* 4 (1990), 658-668, pp. 663-664 (with references).

[84] Aramaic inscription from Arebsun, mentioning the Mazdayasnian religion (*dynmzdysnš*), Ahura Mazdā and Bel: M. Lidzbarski, 'Aramäische Inschriften aus Kappadocien', in *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik* 1 (Giessen 1902), 59-74; 319-326; H. Donner & W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*, Wiesbaden 1971^3, vol. 3 no. 264; *HZ* II, 274-275. Bilingual inscription from Faraša: *CIMRM* 19; *HZ* III, 272-273. Greek inscription from Ortaköy: R.P. Harper, 'A dedication to the goddess Anaïtis at Ortaköy, North of Aksaray (Nitalis?)', *AnSt* 17 (1967), 193; R. Schmitt, 'BARZOXARA. Ein neues Anāhitā-epitheton aus Kappadokien', *KZ* 84 (1970), 207-210; *HZ* III, 271; S. Wikander, 'BARZOXAPA', *Acta Orientalia* 34 (1972), 13-15.

[85] Basil, *Epistle* 258.4; cf. ch. 4.7.2; Kirdīr: KKZ 12; KNRm 38-9; KSM 18.

[86] The same term is applied to the Magi by the Christian author Sozomenus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.9.1. Herodotus, as is well known, considered the Magi to be a tribe (γένος) among the Medes, *Histories* 1.101 (and cf. ch. 4.7.1).

Earlier scholars suggested that *puraithos* was the translation of Avestan *aθauruuan-*, "priest", because they thought this term was composed with the word *ātar-/āθr-*, "fire".[91] This etymology, however, has long been abandoned; the Avestan word is cognate with Sanskrit *átharvan-*, which contains no allusion to fire, and the functions of the Avestan *aθauruuan-* were not specifically linked with fire either.[92] The word puraithos has also been taken to be a rendering of Iranian **ātrvaxša-*, "firekindler," which some scholars have recognised in the Elamite tablets.[93] Since the interpretation of the word on the Elamite tablets is far from settled, however, it seems better to regard the Greek word as a new formation, without any relation to an existing Iranian title or function.[94]

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[87] Kirsten's reference ('Cappadocia', 877) to Eustathius' *Paraphrasis* of Dionysius' *Periegesis*, should be to Eustathius' *Commentaries* on the same text, 970, where he explicitly quotes "the Geographer", i.e. Strabo and only explains the term *puraithos* and adds to it that the Magi also practise fire divination. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 7, concluded from this reference to divination that Eustathius did not take his material from Strabo, and that the word *puraithos* was not coined by Strabo, but taken from the stock of Greek cult terms for an Iranian religion from Pontus. This, however, fails to convince, first of all in the light of Eustathius' explicit mention of "the Geographer" as his source, and secondly, because Eustathius had ample possibilities of collating different traditions and applying them to the Cappadocian priests. That the Magi practised fire divination was something of a Byzantine *cliché*, repeated a.o. by Procopius, *De Bello Persico* 2.24.2 and Agathias, *Histories* 2.25.

[88] S. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 1-7; Vermaseren, *CCCA* VI (1989), no. 385; M. Tacheva-Hitova, *Eastern Cults in Moesia Inferior and Thracia (5th century B.C.—4th century A.D.)* (EPRO 95), Leiden 1983, 73-74, no. 4 (with bibliography).

[89] The inscription reads: *L. Oppius Maximus sacerdos M(atris) D(eorum) dendroforis et dumopiretis d(onum) d(edit)*, "Lucius Oppius Maximus, priest of the Mother of the Gods, gave [this] as a gift to the *dendrofori* and the *dumopireti*." The inscription contains clear references to the cult of the Great Mother: it mentions her name and a category of her cultic personnel, the *dendrophoroi*.

[90] For this word, cf. O. Masson, 'Le mot ΔΟΥΜΟΣ "confrérie" dans les textes et les inscriptions', *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 41 (1987), 145-152. It is often thought that δοῦμος is an indigenous Anatolian word, virtually synonymous with other words for cult associations such as θίασος. Since the word is applied to cult associations connected with the Great Mother, with Anaïtis (P. Herrmann, *Ergebnisse einer Reise in Nordostlydien*, Wien 1962, 37, no. 25), Men (Lane, *CMRDM* 1, no. D3), Zeus Masphalatenos, Men Tiamu and Men Tyrannos (Lane, *CMRDM* III, no. 53) and Mandros (H. Engelmann, *InsKyme*, no. 37), the Anatolian background of the term seems to be ascertained. An interesting inscription from Moesia Inferior, quoted in Vermaseren, *CCCA* VI (1989), no. 454 and Tacheva-Hitova, *Eastern Cults*, no. 14, pp. 78-80, mentions a *pater dumi*, a *mater dumi* and *sacrati dumi*. Wikander's theory of the existence of a non-Zoroastrian Iranian fire cult remains highly speculative and cannot be settled by a reference to this intriguing compound.

[91] For instance Moulton, *EZ*, 408, n. 6.

Strabo's information on the manner of slaughtering (with a club) is valuable for its preciseness. First of all, he suggests that the regular manner of slaughtering was performed with a knife, as it is performed by the Greeks and by the Persians alike (cf. above). The specific manner of slaughtering among the Cappadocian Magi—the clubbing of the victim—has been variously interpreted. Benveniste simply mentions the fact that such a practice was not found in the Avesta, whereas Clemen and Moulton refer to similar practices in wholly unrelated cultures.[95] More important observations, however, were made by Boyce and Grenet. Their argument is rather complex and begins with the Greek and Aramaic inscription from Faraša: "Sagarios the son of Magapharnes, *stratēgos* of Ariaramneia, sacrificed to Mithra."[96] Since the publication of the great inscription of Šābuhr I on the Ka'beh-ye Zardušt, we know that the Greek verb μαγεύω is the translation of MP *yaštan* (*YDBWḤWN-tn*), "to sacrifice".[97] The Greek text therefore means "he sacrificed to Mithra." In a fundamental contribution to the interpretation of ancient Zoroastrian sacrifice, Benveniste showed that the verb *yaštan*, "to sacrifice" was borrowed in Armenian (*yaz-el*) to express the manner of slaughtering described by Strabo, by clubbing the victim.[98] The *Dēnkard*, moreover, and some Syriac and Armenian texts also refer to the practice.[99] A very good example is also found in the *Draxt ī Asūrīg* 14-17. In this small book, a dispute between a Babylonian tree and a goat on the question who is the best, the tree addresses the goat thus: "They make ropes of me / which bind your legs. They make clubs of me / which break your neck. They make pegs of me / which hang you upside down. I am fuel for fires / which roast you terribly."[100]

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[92] The terms are extensively treated by Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 9-14.

[93] Koch, *Religiösen Verhältnisse*, 159-164; *Es kündet Dareios der König*, 280. Against reading **ātrvaxša-* in El. *d ha-tur-ma-ak-šá*, cf. *HZ* II, 135-136.

[94] Widengren, *Religionen*, 175-176, suggests *aēθrapaiti-*, which, however, means "teacher-priest"; cf. Kreyenbroek, 'Zoroastrian Priesthood', 152-154. Wikander's suggestions that *aēθrapaiti-* etymologically means "fire-priest," upheld by Widengren, *Religionen*, 261, n. 5, is wrong and has been almost universally rejected. For the Arabic passages Wikander adduced, cf. M.-L. Chaumont, 'Recherches sur le clergé zoroastrien: le hērbad', *RHR* 158 (1960), 161-179.

[95] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 61; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 144; Moulton, *EZ*, 408-409, n. 7.

[96] Σάγαριος Μαγ[αφά]ρνου στρατηγ[ὸ]ς 'Αριαραμνεί[ας] ἐμάγευσε Μίθρῃ / *sgr br mhgprn rbmg' mgyš [lm]trh*. Cf. *HZ* III, 272-273. There has been a long discussion on the translation of the crucial words ἐμάγευσε Μίθρῃ, whether they mean "he performed a Magian rite for Mithra" or "he became a Magus for Mithra." The latter translation, interpreting the text as recording the initiation of a Persian official into a priesthood of a Mithra cult, was proposed by, a.o., Cumont, *Rel.Or.*^{4}, 274, n. 23; Benveniste, *Les Mages dans l'ancien Iran*, 29-30. The (correct) translation "he performed a Magian rite for Mithra" was suggested already by Widengren, *Religionen*, 177-178 with n. 17.

Whether it follows, as Boyce and Grenet suggest, that this was the *only* manner of sacrifice, is uncertain. Strabo explicitly mentions the Cappadocian rite as exceptional and seems to imply the cutting of the victim's throat in his earlier description of the sacrifice to the waters. The comparable practice of strangulating the animal before the shedding of blood has been noted by ancient authors for the Scythians and the Indians.[101]

And there are fire-sanctuaries, noteworthy enclosures; in the midst of these is an altar, on which there is a large quantity of ashes, and (where) the Magi keep the fire ever burning.

Strabo gives two different descriptions and appellations of the temple buildings of the Persians, πυραιθεῖα, "fire-sanctuaries", apparently a *hapax*, evidently formed on the basis of the *puraithoi*, and ἱερά, "sanctuaries." This presumably reflects the difference between the fire-temples and image-shrines, a difference also known from other parts of the Iranian world. The *puraitheia* are described as “remarkable enclosures” (σηκοί τινες ἀξιόλογοι). The term used for enclosure, σηκός, needs to be specified somewhat more. It has many different meanings, all expressing a certain type of enclosed space. Thus, in Homer it regularly means “stable”, the place where the cattle are kept and bred.[102] It can also mean “nest” or “lair,” but it usually refers to (sacred) buildings or sites. In this architectural meaning, it often refers to an open-air site enclosed by a wooden palisade, dedicated to the worship of the heroes. Such a meaning, however, appears to be impossible on practical grounds for the Zoroastrian fire-sanctuaries.[103] It is well known from other sources, particularly from inscriptions, however, that σηκός can mean the “inner sanctum” of the sanctuary, the cella,[104] and also any regular temple building. P. Bernard has suggested that the word as used by Strabo should be taken to mean the “cella,” the inner sanctum of the fire temple, comparable to the chamber in the fire temples of Lydia as described by Pausanias.[105] There are some problems with this. First of all, it is clear that Strabo uses σηκός as an interpretative synonym of πυραιθεῖον, which by common consent refers to a building or enclosure, at least to a well-defined whole and not a part of a structure. He calls them, moreover, remarkable or eye-catching which would be strange for an interior detail (however important) of a larger whole. On the other hand, when discussing the shrines of Anaïtis and Ōmanos, he adds that “of these there are also σηκοί” (see below), as if describing a part of their sanctuaries. Nothing permits us to interpret both texts either way; what should be clear, however, is the fact that Strabo mentions buildings or parts of buildings and does not imply open-air sanctuaries.

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[97] Cf. *HZ* III, 273.

[98] Benveniste, 'Sur la terminologie iranienne du sacrifice', *JA* 252 (1964), 45-58.

[99] For these texts, cf. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 52, n. A; text F8; Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, text S4.

[100] For the translation, cf. C.J. Brunner, 'The Fable of *The Babylonian Tree*', *JNES* 39 (1980), 191-202; 291-302. For the text (PhlT. 109-114), cf. M. Navvābī, *Draxt Āsūrīg. Matn-e pahlavī, āvā-nevešt, tarjomeh-ye fārsī, fehrest-e vāže-hā va yād-dāšt-hā* [Draxt Āsūrīg. Pahlavi text, transcription, Persian translation, glossary and notes], n.p. 1363 A.H.S.^{2}.

[101] Scythians: Herodotus, *Histories* 4.60. Indians: Strabo, *Geography* 16.1.54.

In the centre of the building stands an altar, on which there is a mound of ashes. As Boyce and Grenet already noticed, this is the first instance where the word βωμός is used for the fire altar (or fire holder), for this is obviously the structure referred to.[106]

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[102] *Iliad* 18.589; *Odyssey* 9.219; 9.227 etc: *LSJ*, s.vv. σηκός and σηκοκόρος.

[103] Clemen, *Nachrichten* 99, already argued for the impossibility of an eternal fire as described by Strabo (with a heap of ashes on the altar) in an open air sanctuary.

[104] Hesychius, s.v. σηκός· ἐνδότερος τόπος τοῦ ἱεροῦ. Cf. also 2 Maccabees 14.33, where the word is used for the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Temple in Jerusalem.

[105] Bernard, ‘Le temple du dieu Oxus’, 98-99, n. 58; Pausanias 5.27.6.

[106] *HZ* III, 269, n. 67.

Strabo's description of the ashes on the altar is comparable with Pausanias' famous description of the fire-temples of Lydia.[107] The large quantity of ashes is obviously due to the fact that the Magi keep the fire continually burning.

That the fire in the Persian temples is kept continually burning is common knowledge in Classical literature. Q. Curtius Rufus, for instance, calls the fire *aeternum*,[108] and the many stories about the quenching of the fire, on the orders of Alexander, after the death of Hephaistion also suggest the practice.[109] In later periods, the expression "eternal fire" or "unquenchable fire" becomes a standard phrase.[110]

The prominence of ashes in the Iranian fire-cult also gave rise to derogatory terms for Zoroastrians and fire-temples in Armenian: *moxrapašt*, "ash-worshipper" and *tun moxranocʿ*, "house of ashes."[111] Lesser temple-fires were allowed to "sleep," to smother under a heap of ashes; this seems to be the practice recorded by Strabo and Pausanias.[112]

And every day, they enter and sing invocations for approximately an hour, holding the bundle of wands before the fire, wearing felt tiaras which fall down on both sides over the cheeks to cover the lips.

The Magi enter the fire-sanctuary every day (καθ' ἡμέραν)[113] to perform their rituals. These rituals consist of the recitation of texts by priests holding the *baresman*; they last approximately an hour. The texts are recited facing the fire, in accordance with the

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[107] Pausanias 5.27.5; cf. ch. 4.5.1.

[108] Curtius Rufus 3.3.9; 4.13.12; 4.14.24. Cf. also Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.34.

[109] Diodorus Siculus 17.114. For this custom, cf. P. Briant, 'Le roi est mort: vive le roi!', in Kellens (ed.), *Religion iranienne*, 1-11. Cf. also W. Nagel & B. Jacobs, 'Königsgötter und Sonnengottheit bei altiranischen Dynastien', *IrAnt* 24 (1989), 337-389, pp. 373-375.

[110] Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.8.11; Procopius, *De Bello Persico* 1.24.2. Cf. ch. 4.5.1.

[111] For these terms and their background, cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 481-514; Benveniste, 'Terminologie iranienne', 54-55.

[112] M. Boyce, 'On the Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians', *BSOAS* 31 (1968), 52-68.

[113] Moulton, *EZ*, 409 with n. 1, translates "by day" and interprets it in the light of the prohibition of nightly rituals. The phrase καθ' ἡμέραν can mean both, but translating it as "every day" (with distributive *kata*) appears to fit the context better.

Zoroastrian prescriptions.[114] The description of the priest Strabo gives is very precise. He wears a felt tiara, of which the cheek-pieces have been folded together to cover the lips. This is a practice comparable with the *paitidāna-*, the piece of cloth covering the mouth of the officiating priest to prevent his breath from polluting the fire.[115] In contemporary Zoroastrianism, the *padām* is a separate piece of light white cloth.[116] No ancient representation of the contemporary *padām* is known; the reliefs and coins always depict the type of *paitidāna-* described by Strabo, which therefore presumably represents Western Iranian practice.[117]

The same customs are observed in the sanctuaries of Anaïtis and Omanos; these also have enclosures, and the image of Omanos is carried around in a procession. These things we have seen ourselves, but the other things and those which follow are recorded in the histories.

The rituals described by Strabo are not only observed in the fire-temples, but also in the image shrines. These observances therefore include the typical priestly garments, the bundle of sacred wands, the chanting in front of the fire etc. Strabo therefore—as the only authority—attributes standard Zoroastrian rituals to the Zoroastrian image shrines. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this information: in the Sasanian period statue cult was entirely abandoned and all image shrines disappeared. We know virtually nothing of the rituals conducted in these image places.

Strabo mentions two Iranian divinities who are worshipped in a shrine, Anaïtis and Ōmanos. Anaïtis is well known and references to her temples abound in Classical literature.[118] The second divinity, Ōmanos, is more problematic. Strabo mentions this divinity in two distinct passages. In *Geography* 11.8.4, Strabo describes the "sanctuary of Anaïtis and the gods who share her altar, Ōmanos and Anadatos, Persian gods" in Zela. In the present passage, he refers to a sanctuary of Anaïtis and Ōmanos and mentions an image of Ōmanos that is used in a procession.

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[114] MX 53: *Pursīd dānāg ō Mēnōg ī Xrad kū namāz ud stāyišn ī yazdān cīyōn kunišn? Mēnōg ī Xrad passox kard kū harw rōz 3 bār padīrag xwaršēd ud Mihr cīyōn pad āgenēn rawēnd ēstādan ud hamgōnag māh ud ātaxš ī Wahrām ayāb ātaxš ī ādarōg bāmdād ud nēmrōz ud ēbārag namāz ud stāyišn kardan ud spāsdār būdan*. "The wise man asked the Spirit of Wisdom: "How should one pray and praise the gods?" The Spirit of Wisdom answered: "One should stand three times every day facing the sun and Mihr—for the two run together. And similarly one should pray and praise and be grateful to the moon and the Wahrām fire or the *ādarōg* fire in the morning, at noon and in the evening." This manner of praying—facing the sun as source of light—can be found in several Classical passages: cf. ch. 4.6.3.

[115] The *paitidāna-* (Phl. *padām*, NP *panām*) is mentioned twice in the *Vendīdād* as part of the priestly garments, 14.8 and 18.1. The word is of secular origin, as is clear from Vd. 14.9 and Yt. 5.123.

[116] Cf. the illustrations in Kotwal & Boyd, *Persian Offering*, plate 8; 11.

[117] It is generally unclear whether the *paitidāna-* on the reliefs, seals and coins distinguished priests or noblemen, for both seem to have been obliged to wear it in front of the sacred fire etc. Cf. *HZ* III, 99-100.

The identity of the two divinities Ōmanos and Anadatos has been the subject of several investigations. At present it is almost universally accepted that Ōmanos is Vohu Manah, the Amesha Spenta "Good Thought," lord of cattle.[119] Earlier scholars have proposed quite different interpretations. Markwart interpreted *Ōmanos* as *Hōm anōš*, "immortal Haoma", but this is very unsatisfactory, if only for the fact that *anōš* is not a standard epithet of Haoma.[120] J.J. Modi made a radically different proposal for both Ōmanos and Anadatos.[121] Basing himself on the shapes of the letters of the book-Pahlavi script, he argued that Phl. *Hordād* (Haurvatāt) could have been read as *ʾnndtʹ*, "anandād", which may have been rendered in Greek as Ana(n)datēs. Likewise, Phl. *Amurdād* (Ameretāt) could be read as *ʾmndtʹ*, "omandād", which hypocoristically could become Omanos. This suggestion hinges on the shape of the Pahlavi letter *w*, in which five different letters have amalgamated. In epigraphical Middle Persian, however, a script that is at least somewhat closer to Strabo's time than book-Pahlavi, "n" and "r" are still distinguished.[122] It is unlikely anyway that the solution to the names of Strabo's divinities should be sought in anyone's misreading of Middle Persian names.

Benveniste rejected the interpretation of Ōmanos as Vohu Manah, because this divinity was only "a colourless abstraction." Instead, he interpreted Ōmanos in the present passage as Verethraghna (by emending the name to *Ouara(ra)nes*) and Ōmanos and Anadatos in *Geography* 11.8.4 as Haurvatāt and Ameretāt.[123] There is no reason, however, to suppose that Strabo was referring to two different divinities by the name Ōmanos, and the emendation of Ōmanos to Ouaranos in the present passage clearly confuses the matter more than retaining the form Ōmanos and interpreting it as Vohu Manah.

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[118] Cf. ch. 4.1.3.

[119] Cf., for a recent interpretation, *HZ* III, 270.

[120] J. Markwart, *Wehrot und Arang. Untersuchungen zur mythischen und geschichtlichen Landeskunde von Ostiran*, Leiden 1938, 129-130.

[121] J.J. Modi, 'The Ameshaspands and Strabo', *The Athenaeum* 4423 (1912 II), 120. Modi's interpretation of the statue of Ōmanos (in his view Ameretāt) as "some agricultural symbol" is of course wrong, as is his opinion that Strabo describes "some corrupted form of Zoroastrianism, observed in an out-of-the-way place."

[122] D.N. Mackenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, London 1971, xi, contains a good table of the development of Middle Persian scripts.

L.H. Gray proposed the most radical solution. In his view, Ōmanos was Vohu Manah, who was actually Mithra. This is part of his general theory on the absence of Mithra in the Gāthās; he considered Vohu Manah to be the Gathic transformation of Mithra. Anadatos was to be read as **anādāta-*, which he interpreted as "uncreated" and claimed as a new, unattested epithet of Ahura Mazdā. Thus he had found the ancient triad Ahura Mazdā—Mithra—Anāhitā.[124] Gray's suggestions, however, fail to convince on two counts: that Vohu Manah is actually Mithra is difficult to believe, for the only connection between the two is their link with cattle; the divinities are wholly different in other respects. The epithet **anādāta-*, moreover, does not mean "uncreated." Such an epithet would be **adāta-* or **aδāta-* or would be formed with a different verb (**atašta-* etc.). The Greek *Anadatos* or *Anadatēs* could render Iranian **an-ā-dāta-*, "who is not bound by the Law."[125] It is, however, impossible to find an Iranian god who could suitably have been called "who is not bound by the Law." Wikander argued for a derivation from Iranian **āna*, which would refer to a breathing technique, but he did not explain the name further.[126] The name therefore, although it sounds Iranian, remains a mystery.

As has been argued above, the phonetic correspondence between Ōmanos and Vohu Manah seems to be close. That the final part of the name, *-manos*, corresponds with Iranian *manah-* seems to be evident, although Iranian *manah-* in similar compounds is most frequently rendered *-menēs* in Greek.[127] There are, however, several epigraphical finds of the name *Ōmanos* or similar names, which all end in *-man(i)os*.[128] The correspondence between *-ō-* and *vohu-/vahu-* is less amply attested, but there is at least one certain example, **V(ah)auka-* is rendered as *Ōchos*.[129] Examples of the correspondence between Iranian va- and Greek o- can be found in the name *Olophernēs/Orophernēs*, rendering **varu-farnah-*.[130] Ōmanos can therefore be safely interpreted as **Va(h)u-manah-*, the OP form of Vohu Manah.

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[123] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 63-68.

[124] Gray, *Foundations*, 34-5; 52-3.

[125] Such a word would be the negation of **ā-dāta-*, "who has the Law", formed like **ā-puθrā-*, "who has a child," Phl. *ābus*, "pregnant." This interpretation of *Anadatos* was suggested to me by Professor Kreyenbroek and by Professor Sims-Williams. A final possible etymology of *Anadatos* would be to compare it with words like *anādruxta-* "undeceived" (Yt. 10.23), *anāhita-*, "undefiled" and *anāstūta-* "uncommitted." It could then mean "to whom has not been given", "who has not received" (cf. Bartholomae, *AIrWb* 718 (^{1}*dā-* + *ā-*): to give, to receive).

[126] Wikander, *Vāyu*, 37; 83-7. Any etymology of the name as containing a breathing technique is certainly wrong.

[127] *Ariamenēs* = **Āriya-mana(h)* (but cf. Lycian *Arijamāna*!); *Arsamenēs* = **ṛša-*

The popularity of Vohu Manah in Asia Minor is attested by some personal names. In itself, it is remarkable that he should have been prominent, because he is closely connected with the other Amesha Spentas. The cult of individual Amesha Spentas is not a common phenomenon in Western Iran. The suggestion by Boyce & Grenet,[131] that he became popular because of his strong links with prophecy and divination (evident from his eponymous *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*),[132] seems attractive. The divinatory function of another Iranian divinity, Verethraghna, is also sometimes invoked to explain his popularity in Asia Minor.[133] That Vohu Manah was connected with prophecy is clear from most Zoroastrian texts, for it is he who brings the revelation(s) to Zarathustra and to the faithful.[134]

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manah; *Hieramenēs* = **Vīra-manah*; *Artamenēs* = **ṛta-manah* (but cf. also *Artemanou*); *Smerdomenēs* = **Bṛdi-manah*. For all these names: Mayrhofer, *On Pers.*, indices s.vv.

[128] *HZ* III, 249-250.

[129] Mayrhofer, *On Pers.*, 284, n. 71.

[130] R. Schmitt, 'Einige Iranische Namen auf Inschriften oder Papyri', *ZPE* 17 (1975), 15-24.

[131] *HZ* III, 270; 384.

[132] This is not the place to enter the discussion on the *ZWY* — whether it goes back to an Avestan Yašt or not. Suffice it to mention the fact that the *ZWY* in its present redaction is a text from the Islamic period, but referring to a lost Avestan original. For various views on the nature of the *ZWY*, it is easy to compare the extreme point of view of Ph. Gignoux, 'Sur l'inexistence d'un Bahman Yašt avestique', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 32 (1986), 53-64, with that of M. Boyce, 'The Poems of the Persian Sybil and the Zand ī Vahman Yašt', in: C.-H. de Fouchécour & Ph. Gignoux (eds.), *Etudes irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard* (Studia Iranica Cahier 7), Paris 1989, 59-77. Cf. now C. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn. A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (SOR 75), Roma 1995, 15-27.

[133] Cf., for instance, Waldmann, *Mazdaismus*, 122-127; but cf. P. Bernard, 'Héraclès, les grottes de Karafto et le sanctuaire du Mont Sambulos', *StIr* 9 (1980), 301-324, for some indispensable corrections in the interpretation of the "sanctuary" of Karafto.

[134] G. Widengren, *The Great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God* (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 1945.5), Uppsala-Leipzig 1945, 42-75. That Vohu Manah brought Zarathustra the revelation (possibly alluded to in Y. 43.7, but cf.

Strabo's text, however, presents one serious problem, the mention of the statue (ξόανον) of Ōmanos, that is carried around in a procession. It has been connected with an inscription from Mesopotamia, mentioning "the image of the Lord Wahman" (*pahikar ī Wahman xwadāy*)[135] but this is highly questionable. The "image" mentioned is more likely to have been that of one of the kings named Wahman, than that of the divinity. A different interpretation was given by A. Hultgård: in Vd. 19.31, Vohu Manah is described as sitting on a throne; from this description, Hultgård concluded that Vohu Manah's concept was influenced by Near Eastern religiosity, presumably via the Graeco-Iranian population of Asia Minor.[136] If this link can indeed be established, it should not be surprising that—in accordance with the imagery connected with Vohu Manah's throne—there would have existed an image of Vohu Manah based on models from the ancient Near East. Such a reconstruction would only seem possible if one accepts a very late date for the composition of the Vendidād, which is not very likely. The problem with Hultgård's theory, moreover, is that he fails to explain the reason why it was Vohu Manah whose concept was thus influenced by the religions of the ancient Near East. Ahura Mazdā, for instance, whose concept in the Achaemenian royal ideology certainly shows many common characteristics with the national gods of Mesopotamia,[137] did not undergo the transformation to a god sitting on a throne in the Avesta. Moreover, in spite of his frequent references to Wikander's *Vayu*, Hultgård has failed to incorporate the many references to the golden throne in Yt. 15, the hymn to Vayu, in which curiously enough it is not Vayu, but his worshippers who sit on the golden throne.[138] There is, however, not only the description of Vohu Manah as sitting on a golden throne that is surprising in

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Humbach, *Gāthās*, *ad locum*), is recognised in all biographical sketches of his life and is referred to by Diodorus Siculus 1.94.2.

[135] S. Wikander, *Vayu I*, 36, referring to the publication of the inscription by P. Jensen, 'Erschliessung der aramäischen Inschriften aus Assur und Hatra', *SPAW* 1919, 1042ff. For the word *xwadāy* as referring to kings, cf. KSM 25.

[136] A. Hultgård, 'Trône de Dieu et trône des justes dans les traditions de l'Iran ancien', in: M. Philonenko (ed.), *Le Trône de Dieu* (WUNT 69), Tübingen 1993, 1-18.

[137] G. Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran: Die Voraussetzungen und die Struktur ihrer Argumentation* (AI 31), Leiden 1992, *passim*.

[138] I do not agree with Wikander's theories on the links between Vayu and Vohu Manah, but he was certainly right in stressing the interdependence of the golden throne-theme in Yt. 15 and Vd. 19.

Vd. 19, but the same chapter has some other very curious references that may illuminate Strabo's reference to his visual representation. In Vd. 19.20-25 (a somewhat corrupt text), Zarathustra asks Ahura Mazdā if Vohu Manah can be purified if he has been mixed with dead matter. Ahura Mazdā answers that he can indeed be purified, with cow's urine and with water. In 19.22-25, the purification is described in greater detail: Vohu Manah must be washed, be lifted up with the right arm and with the left arm; finally, he must be left in the open under the stars for nine nights. Then Vohu Manah is to be scented with incense and certain prayers must be said.

In the translation of this difficult passage in the *PhlVd.*, Vohu Manah is constantly interpreted either as a man or as the priestly garment. It amounts to the following conclusion: "Abarag interprets the passage thus, that he who does not wash his hands, will not have validly performed the *Xwaršēd Niyāyišn* and will not have taken the *bāj*".[139] It is clear from these commentaries that the original meaning of the passage was no longer understood. The name of Vohu Manah is used as a symbol for something else.[140] Whatever it refers to was an object that could be lifted up by hand. Usually, it is thought that it refers to leather and to the (priestly) garment. The *Vendidād*, however, leaves some room for a visible representation of Vohu Manah.

Whatever the interpretation of the details, it seems fair to assume that Strabo, as he indicates in the following sentence, has witnessed a procession in which some sort of a statue or image was carried around, which upon inquiry was explained as a representation of the god Ōmanos. The use of statues in the Anatolian cult of Anaïtis is very well attested and any development of a statue cult of other Iranian divinities, for example of Vohu Manah, though otherwise unattested, must be seen in this light.

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[139] *Abarag az ēn gyāg paydāgēnēd kū kē-š dast nē-šōyēd ā-š xwaršēd nē yašt bawēd u-š wāz nē grift.*

[140] Darmesteter, *SBE* 4, 209-210, n. 8, suggested that Vohu Manah meant a piece of leather clothing, referring to *PhlVd*. 18.2, where it is said that the *mārgan* (mace, snake-killer) is best made from leather (*carmēn*), which is explained by use of an Avestan passage beginning with "he strikes with Vohu Manah" (*vohu manaŋha janaiti*).

4. *Evaluation*

Strabo's description of the Cappadocian cult is the most important description of Zoroastrian rituals in Greek literature. For several aspects of his description, we have to rely on his trustworthiness, since additional information on these rituals is not available. There is a contrast between the information he provides on the religion of the Persians in general, which largely follows a pattern recognisable from Herodotus, and his information on the Cappadocian rituals. Strabo here describes three different rituals: the libation to fire, a sacrifice to the waters and the daily ritual of tending the fire.

The libation to fire consists of the recitation of texts with the pouring onto the fire of melted animal fat. The various elements of the libation to fire can be connected with Zoroastrian texts or explained in comparison with Vedic rituals. The sacrifice to the waters is only known from Strabo: the animal is killed in a trench close by the waters and a libation is poured onto the earth. In his description of the libation, it seems that the resemblance between the Persian ritual and Greek chthonic rituals has resulted in a somewhat mixed description, where elements of both traditions have merged. In the absence of further materials, it is impossible to decide whether this has implications for the ritual itself, or for the way Strabo has described it. The daily ritual of tending the fire resembles the cult of lesser fires. It is a simple ritual of feeding the fire and reciting texts in front of it, comparable to modern rituals such as *bōy dādan* (offering incense to the fire).

Of particular interest is the fact that Strabo writes that the rituals performed by the Cappadocian priests are similar in fire-sanctuaries and in image-shrines. Since we do not have any additional information on the rituals in temples where statues of Iranian divinities were worshipped, this strongly suggests that the "normal" Zoroastrian rituals were also maintained there.

3. *Plutarch,* De Iside et Osiride *46-47 (369D-370C)*

1. *Introduction*

Plutarch of Chaeronea was one of the most prolific writers of antiquity. His works survive in large numbers, though several texts are attributed to him that he cannot possibly have written. An early list of his writings, the so-called *Lamprias Catalogue*, lists 227 compositions. The range of subjects he covered is dazzling: from the eating of meat to the virtues of women, from the face in the moon disk to the delay of divine justice, from music to animal psychology.[1] For practical purposes, his works have been divided into two large collections: the *Moralia* and the *Parallel Lives*. The latter collection includes biographies of Greek and Roman military leaders, politicians and rulers.[2] All other works are collected in the *Moralia*. Plutarch is also one of the authors from antiquity who wrote much on the Persians and their religion. Since we can be reasonably certain that he never visited Iran or any other Zoroastrian land and never met Zoroastrian priests, his detailed descriptions of Persian beliefs and customs also show how much information on these matters was available to educated Greeks.

Plutarch was born into a high-ranking family in the Boeotian town of Chaeronea, halfway between Athens and Delphi, around the year 45 CE.[3] It is thought that he died around 125 CE.[4] He was a student of philosophy in Athens, where he was educated by the Alexandrian Platonist Ammonius, who was in charge of a Platonist Academy there at least in CE 66-67. Ammonius' variety of Platonism is thought to have been "orthodox" but showing some peculiar developments, especially on the subject of demonology; he taught that the unchangeable Supreme Deity cannot be held responsible for all acts and experiences (for reasons of his total transcendence), but that many of the acts and experiences commonly ascribed to the supreme God in fact belong to a secondary god, or rather a demon, who may be called Hades or Pluto.[5] This aspect of his philosophical ideas has sometimes been connected with an interest in Zoroastrianism, which is also detectable in Plutarch's own works. Since Ammonius' ideas can only be reconstructed from the works of Plutarch, however, it is difficult to decide whether these views are his or Plutarch's.

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[1] An overview of all his works (and his life) is available in K. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironeia* (= *RE* 21.636-962), Stuttgart 1964².

[2] For new perspectives on the *Lives*, cf. the articles in P. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*, London 1992.

[3] For introductions to his life and works, cf. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironea*; D.A. Russell, *Plutarch*, London 1972; for Plutarch as a philosopher, cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220,* London 1977, 184-230; *id.*, 'Plutarch and Second Century Platonism', in: A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality. Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, New York 1986 (repr. in *The Golden Chain. Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity*, Aldershot 1990, nr. XIII).

[4] Ziegler, *Plutarchos*, 4-5; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 186.

Plutarch travelled a little in the ancient world. He probably visited parts of Anatolia, Italy and Egypt.[6] The larger part of his life, however, was spent in Chaeronea itself, which was conveniently close to Delphi, where Plutarch functioned as a priest for a very long time. Several of his treatises have Delphi and its oracle as their subject. His loyalty to this sanctuary emerges clearly from these books; they add greatly to our knowledge of Delphi and its sanctuary. The influence of Plutarch's exceptional career as a practising priest *and* a Platonist philosopher is also felt in other treatises. *De Iside et Osiride* is perhaps a good example.

De Iside et Osiride is a book on myth.[7] It is thought to be among Plutarch's latest works, and may have been composed shortly before his death.[8] The book is dedicated to his friend Clea (as is *The virtues of women*), who was a priestess of Isis. It is unknown whether Plutarch was an initiate of the cult of Isis; the evidence to this effect is inconclusive.[9] In the first two chapters of *De Iside*, Plutarch explains to Clea that the most important thing of all is knowledge of the gods. This is evident already from the name of the goddess Isis, which Plutarch interprets as a reference to wisdom.[10] He then proceeds to describe certain customs associated with the cult of Osiris and Isis (chs. 3-9) and relates the myth of Isis, Osiris and Seth-Typhon in great detail (chs. 12-21): Osiris,

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[5] *De E apud Delphos* 393Aff; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 184; 189-192.

[6] Ziegler, *Plutarchos*, 17-21.

[7] For Plutarch's use of myths in expounding his philosophical ideas, cf. Y. Vernière, *Symboles et mythes dans la pensée de Plutarque. Essai d'interprétation philosophique et religieuse des Moralia*, Paris 1977.

[8] For editions and commentaries, cf. Th. Hopfner, *Plutarch. Über Isis und Osiris*, Prague 1940-1941 (Darmstadt 1967^2; 2 vols.); J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, Cambridge 1970; C. Froidefond, *Plutarque. Œuvres morales V:2. Isis et Osiris*, Paris 1988. For the date of the work, cf. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside*, 16-18.

[9] Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside*, 96-98.

[10] *De Iside* 2; 60.

Isis and Typhon belong to the same generation of gods. Osiris is the bringer of culture to the Egyptians and the supreme ruler. Typhon plots against him and manages to kill him with a trick: he secretly takes the measure of Osiris' body and fashions a sarcophagus in which only his body fits. Many gods are invited to try the sarcophagus, but it does not fit them; finally, Osiris takes his place in the sarcophagus and Typhon and his helpers immediately close it and throw it into the river that flows to the sea. Isis then goes in search of Osiris and locates the sarcophagus containing his corpse in a pillar supporting the palace at Byblos. She obtains the sarcophagus and leaves Byblos. When she has left the sarcophagus alone, Typhon comes upon it and recognises it; he cuts the corpse of Osiris into 14 pieces and disperses them. Isis again goes in search of the different parts of Osiris' body, locates them (with the exception of the male member) and buries them at the localities where she has found them.

In the remainder of the book, Plutarch is concerned with the interpretation of this myth. He rejects some of the suggested interpretations (the Euhemerist interpretation, according to which Osiris, Isis and Typhon had been mere mortals; chs. 22-24), and simply lists several others (physical interpretation (chs. 32-40); astrological interpretation (chs. 41-44)). After a brief interlude on dualism, in which Zoroastrianism is used as the main example, he gives the Platonist interpretation and application of the myth.

Three characteristic aspects of Plutarch's philosophy are relevant for a discussion of his views on Zoroastrianism: the complementarity of myth and ritual as instruments for knowing the divine; Plutarch's demonology; and his dualism. In *De Iside*, Plutarch repeatedly stresses the unity and coherence of doctrine and ritual. In several passages, he explicitly mentions the fact that not only rational thinking, but also the performance of the appropriate rituals can provide the believers with opportunities to know the supreme Good.[11] In this, he applies two standards, knowledge (γνῶσις etc.) and understanding (νόησις etc.). Knowledge can be obtained through performing the rituals, but understanding only through the rational faculties. The third distinction, sense-perception (αἴσθησις), does not lead to the supreme good, but only to a manner of speaking of it in terms understandable to human beings. Myths should not be taken literally, but are among the ways open to mankind to speak of what is really ineffable. Taking myths literally, without interpreting them philosophically, provokes superstition (δεισιδαιμονία), which is as bad as atheism.[12] This attitude is also evident from the passages where Plutarch attempts to distinguish the "useful" myths from incredible elaborations upon the theme: useful myths are those that are connected with the rituals and the cult, whereas the elaborations upon myths by poets are to be considered misleading and counterproductive.[13]

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[11] *De Iside* 2.352A; 8.353E; 11.355C; 45.369CD.

A particularly problematic issue is Plutarch's philosophical category of "demons."[14] In several of his philosophical works, Plutarch stresses the importance of recognising a class of beings between humans and gods: the demons. He attributes this view to Plato, which is in a sense correct; the concept of intermediary beings between gods and men, however, belonged to the common world-view of Plutarch's time.[15] It is difficult to reconstruct a coherent view on demons from Plutarch's many works. In *De Iside* 26, Plutarch adduces a mass of evidence from Homer, Hesiod and Plato to prove that demons are of a mixed nature, good or evil and that they are intermediary between gods and men: "Plato calls this species one which interprets and serves, being intermediary between gods and men."[16] Since nature is susceptible to change, the status of mortals, heroes, demons and gods can also change; in *De defectu oraculorum* 10-13, the four classes of beings (gods, demons, heroes, men, excluding the fifth category, animals)[17] are partly described as fluent categories and the demons—on the basis of their being susceptible to change—are even said to die. Thus Plutarch admits of the possibility for mortals to become heroes, for heroes to become demons and for demons to become gods;[18] there is a continuing chain of change, which can also be reversed: demons can become heroes etc. There is confusing evidence with regard to the question whether there are originally evil demons. Although in *De Iside*, Plutarch appears to recognise these, he attributes a more varied nature to the demons in other works.[19]

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[12] *De Iside* 11.355C.

[13] *De Iside* 20.358EF.

[14] For the demons in Plutarch's works, cf. G. Soury, *La démonologie de Plutarque. Essai sur les idées religieuses et les mythes d'un platonicien éclectique*, Paris 1942.

[15] For which, cf. Dillon, 'Plutarch and Second Century Platonism.'

[16] *De Iside* 26.361B; trl. Griffiths; the reference is to Plato, *Symposium* 202E.

[17] Present in *De E apud Delphos* 13.390EF.

[18] A famous example is *De Iside* 27.361E: "She (Isis) herself and Osiris were transformed through their virtue from good daemons into gods, just as later Heracles and Dionysus were, and so they receive the honours, not unsuitably fused, pertaining to both gods and daemons, having power everywhere, but

The stress on the evil demons in *De Iside* is probably due to the views on dualism Plutarch expresses in this particular book. These are not entirely coherent either, but it is clear from *De Iside* that Plutarch acknowledges the existence of three (and possibly more) principles: the good God, the maleficent God (associated with matter) and a middle nature. This middle nature (the World Soul) is irrational and subject to evil, though not evil in itself. This system is an elaboration upon traces of similar views in Plato. The result of it, however, is peculiar to Plutarch.[20] Since it is expressed most clearly in his description of Zoroastrianism, his views on this problem may have been influenced by Zoroastrian dualism, even though a third divine nature (a mixture of good and evil) is absent from Zoroastrian doctrine.[21] Dualism, in Plutarch's view, is an indispensable element of sound metaphysics: the divine is the One and it is good and ordered. It can therefore not be held responsible for evil; evil is due to the Indefinite Dyad or the evil god, who rules the sublunar realm and is associated with matter.

In his interpretation of the myths of Isis, Osiris and Seth-Typhon, Plutarch discusses dualism at length (chs. 45-49). The main protagonists of the myth correspond to the three principles: Osiris is entirely good; Typhon is entirely evil and Isis is a middle nature between these. Plutarch ascribes such varieties of dualism to Greek, Persian and Chaldaean philosophies. Before he describes the main representatives of cosmogonical dualism, the Persians, he gives a programmatic statement that is thought to sum up his own ideas: "[...] the universe is not kept on high of itself without mind and reason and guidance, nor is it only one reason that rules and directs it in the manner of rudders or curbing reins, but [...] many powers do so who are a mixture of evil and good. Rather, since nature, to be plain, contains nothing

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especially in the domains above and below the earth." (trl. Gwyn Griffiths). Cf. also *De Defectu Oraculorum* 10.415B; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 219.

[19] Cf. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 206-219.

[20] Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 202-206.

[21] Creation itself, of course, is a mixture of good and evil in Zoroastrianism.

that is unmixed, it is not one steward that dispenses our affairs for us, as though mixing drinks from two jars in a hotel. Life and the cosmos, on the contrary—if not the whole cosmos, at least the earthly one next to the moon, which is heterogeneous, many-hued and subject to all changes—are compounded of two opposite principles and of two antithetic powers, one of which leads by a straight path to the right, while the other reverses and bends back. For if nothing comes into being without a cause, and if good could not provide the cause of evil, then nature must contain in itself the creation and origin of evil as well as good."[22]

These ideas correspond closely to Plutarch's interpretation of the Zoroastrian doctrine concerning the two spirits. His description of that doctrine, therefore, is not an impartial rendering of knowledge he came to possess on the subject, but an application of such knowledge. Plutarch generally gave a strong personal touch to the subjects he discussed; in the case of his description of Zoroastrianism we encounter the same situation. Nevertheless, Plutarch's information on the whole is excellent. It is therefore a pity that we do not know which sources he consulted for his work on the Persian religion. In *De Iside* 46-47, he refers to one author by name, Theopompus, who is only mentioned as an authority for the final part of ch. 47, which in more than one respect contains unique materials. Diogenes Laertius (1.8; cf. ch. 3.4) includes Theopompus in his list of authorities who have written on Persian dualism. Theopompus is mentioned there together with Aristotle, Hermippus, and Eudoxus. The latter author is repeatedly quoted in *De Iside*[23] and is known to have had a keen interest in Zoroastrianism from a reference in Pliny, *Natural History* 30.3: he considered the Persian religion to be the clearest and the most useful of all Oriental schools of wisdom (*Eudoxus, qui inter sapientiae sectas clarissimam utilissimamque eam intellegi voluit etc.*). It is therefore a distinct possibility that Plutarch used some of Eudoxus' descriptions of the Persian religion. In the same passage, however, Pliny mentions the fact that Eudoxus had calculated the date of Zoroaster 6000 years before Plato's death.[24] This is not the dating Plutarch follows: he gives Zoroaster's date as 5000 years before the Trojan war. This calculation is generally ascribed to Hermodorus, because he is quoted by Diogenes Laertius 1.2 as having given the same date.[25] Hermodorus, therefore, is also a possible source for Plutarch.

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[22] *De Iside* 45.369CD, trl. Griffiths.

[23] Cf. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside*, index s.v. 'Eudoxus.'

[24] On the technicalities of this dating, cf. Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', 182-183 with n. 64.

Plutarch's description of Zoroastrianism has drawn massive attention from iranianists, classicists and historians of ancient philosophy. There are a substantial number of commentaries on the passage, and even more treatments of details from Plutarch's description of the religion of the Persians.[26] This description is in fact the only surviving Greek text in which we find elaborate priestly Zoroastrian traditions. As we saw earlier, an additional important factor of this particular passage is the fact that it is based exclusively on written Greek sources, not on discussions Plutarch may have had with Zoroastrian priests. Although this does not yield information on individual Greek authors and philosophers—with the exception of Theopompus, Plutarch remains silent on his sources—it does show that for an educated and interested Greek writer, detailed knowledge on Zoroastrianism was indeed available.

2. *Translation*

46. This is the view of the majority and of the wisest; for some believe that there are two gods who are rivals, as it were, in art, the one being the creator of good, the other of evil; others call the better of these a god and his rival a daemon, as, for example,

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[25] The same date is incidentally attributed to Hermippus in Pliny, *Natural History* 30.4

[26] Apart from the commentaries in the editions mentioned above, the passage is discussed extensively in Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 70-79; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 156-159; Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 69-117; Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien*, 279-285; Moulton, *EZ*, 399-407; Boyce, *HZ* II, 235; Boyce & Grenet, *HZ* III, 456-460; 478-479; E. Benveniste, 'Un rite zervanite chez Plutarque', *JA* 215 (1929), 287-296; W. Lentz, 'Plutarch und der Zerwanismus', in: I. Afšār & T.M. Mīnovī (eds.), *Yādnāmeh-ye īrānī-ye Minorsky*, Tehran 1348 A.H.S., 104-124; J. Hani, 'Plutarque en face du dualisme iranien', *REG* 1964, 489-525; J. Ries, 'Plutarque historien et théologien des doctrines dualistes', in: J. Ries, Y. Janssens & J.-M. Sevrin (eds.), *Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique* (PIOL 27), Louvain-la-Neuve 1982, 146-163; M.E.D. Phillips, 'Plutarque interprète de Zoroastre', in: *Actes du VIIIᵉ Congrès de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, Paris 1969, 506-510, R. Turcan, 'Le témoignage de Plutarque', in: Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus* 14-22; J. Dillon, 'The Platonising of Mithra' (rev. of Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*), *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 2 (1977), 79-85 (reprinted in Dillon, *The Golden Chain*, nr. XVII); M.V. Cerutti, *Antropologia e Apocalittica* (Storia delle Religioni 7), Roma 1990, 19-62.

Zoroaster the Magus, who lived, so they record, five thousand years before the Siege of Troy. He used to call the one Horomazes and the other Areimanius, and showed also that the former was especially akin, among objects of perception, to light, and the latter, on the contrary, to darkness and ignorance, while in between the two was Mithras; and this is why the Persians call the Mediator Mithras. He also taught that votive- and thank-offerings should be made to Horomazes, but gloomy offerings to Areimanius, and those intended to avert evil. For they pound a certain herb called *omōmi* in a mortar, invoking Hades and darkness, and then after mixing with it the blood of a slain wolf, they take it out to a sunless spot and throw it away. They believe that among plants too, some belong to the good god and others to the evil demon, and that among animals some, such as dogs, birds and land hedgehogs, belong to the good god, whereas water-rats belong to the bad deity, and for this reason they regard as happy whoever kills a great number of them.

47. But they also relate many mythical details about the gods, and the following are instances. Horomazes is born from the purest light and Areimanius from darkness, and they are at war with one another. The former created six gods, the first being god of good will, the second god of truth, the third god of good order, and the others gods of wisdom and wealth, the sixth being the creator of pleasures in recompense for virtues. The other created an equal number as rivals to these. Then Horomazes, having magnified himself to three times his size, removed himself as far from the sun as the sun is distant from the earth, and adorned the heaven with stars; and one star, Sirius, he established above all others as guardian and watcher. Twenty-four other gods were created by him and put into an egg. Those who were created from Areimanius were of equal number, and they pierced through the egg ... and so it comes about that good and evil are mixed. There will come the destined time when Areimanius, the bringer of plague and famine, must needs be utterly destroyed and obliterated by these. The earth shall be flat and level and one way of life and one government shall arise of all men, who shall be happy and speak the same language. Theopompus says that, according to the Magians, for three thousand years alternately the one god will dominate the other and be dominated, and that for another three thousand years they will

fight and make war, until one smashes up the domain of the other. In the end Hades shall perish and men shall be happy; neither shall they need sustenance nor shall they cast a shadow, while the god who will have brought this about shall have quiet and shall rest, not for a long while indeed for a god, but for such time as would be reasonable for a man who falls asleep. Such is the mythology of the Magi.[27]

3. *Commentary*

This is the view of the majority and of the wisest; for some believe that there are two gods who are rivals, as it were, in art, the one being the creator of good, the other of evil; others call the better of these a god and his rival a daemon, as, for example, Zoroaster the Magus, who lived, so they record, five thousand years before the Siege of Troy.

In the introductory sentences to his description of the Persian religion, Plutarch makes a link with the previous chapter, in which he argued that the recognition of at least two principles of being, one responsible for good, the other one for evil, is a necessary view. This view, moreover, is supported by Greek and by barbarian poets, philosophers, and rituals. His subject, therefore, is made clear from the beginning: Plutarch has a strong interest in dualist speculations that make a distinction between a good and an evil principle. In outlining some of the options available within this framework, he first mentions a system that is not attributed to Iran, but remains without attribution: the belief in a good god and an evil god as the two principles of being.

It is important to notice that this system is not linked with Iran; the passage should therefore not be used in discussions concerning the "orthodox" or Zurvanite nature of the system(s) described by Plutarch.[28] The first system Plutarch attributes to Iran is a dualism recognising two beings, a good one and an evil one, of which the good one is called "god" and the evil one "demon." This is obscured by the fact that in ch. 47, when quoting Theopompus, Plutarch calls both beings "gods".

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[27] Trl. Griffiths with some minor changes; two important changes (the syntax of the phrase referring to Mithras and the function of the sixth god) will be discussed in the commentary.

[28] The argument is sometimes used that the explicit mention of two gods, one being good, the other one evil, implies a Zurvanite system. Since "orthodox" Zoroastrianism recognises only one being who could be termed "god," Ahura Mazdā, who is opposed to an evil spirit, Angra Mainyu, the first system described by Plutarch cannot be Zoroastrianism. Since in Zurvanism the Good and the Evil Spirit are equal in origin, both being the offspring of the god Zurvān, such a system could reflect Zurvanite doctrine. Thus, for example, Widengren, *Religionen*, 215-216. For a critique of this view, cf. ch. 2.5.

Previous interpreters have sought to explain Plutarch's terminology from an inherent judgment of value (the demon is not as powerful as the god) and have therefore suggested that the dualism described here is not "real" dualism.[29] Others have been more cautious and have warned not to attach too much weight to Plutarch's distinction.[30]

The obvious distinction behind Plutarch's different categories "god" and "demon" is that between *yazata* and *daēva*. This is obscured by Plutarch's philosophical view that there is a functional difference between gods and demons: the demon is an intermediate being between man and god, between this world and the other.[31] Moreover, since nature is susceptible to change, the status of mortals, heroes, demons and gods can also change. The demons are of necessity subject to change; this also applies to their being good or evil. In a programmatic statement concerning the two beings (*De Iside* 45.369BC), the powers responsible for the cosmos (that is the demons) are explicitly described as a mixture of evil and good. Plutarch has shown his difficulties in applying a category to the evil principle (whether he is a demon or a god) not only in *De Iside* 46-47 (with its characteristic mix of categories), but also in other passages.[32]

The Iranian distinctions to which these categories are meant to correspond are radically different. Plutarch's claim that it may have been Zoroaster who introduced the notion of "intermediate" demons,[33] is plainly wrong. In Iran, the distinction between *yazata* and *daēva* is an ontological one, and should not be interpreted in a functional manner, especially not if this implies a possibility of change. It is difficult to find adequate concepts to render the distinction between *yazata* and *daēva*. Throughout the

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[29] Moulton, *EZ*, 399, n. 2; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 157: "von einem wirklichen Dualismus [...] ist noch keine Rede."

[30] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 72. Benveniste's interpretation, however, is the most strikingly Zurvanite: *Persian Religion*, 69-117; 'Un rite zervanite chez Plutarque', *passim*. W. Lentz's interpretation of the differences in terms of "different levels of abstraction" ('Plutarch und der Zerwanismus', 115) has contributed little to a better understanding of the text.

[31] *De Iside* 26, and cf. above, ch. 3.3.1.

[32] *De E apud Delphos* 21.394A; possibly *De latenter vivendo* 1130A.

[33] *De Defectu Oraculorum* 10.415A.

Avesta and the Pahlavi books, the *daēvas/dēws* are beings *sui generis*, who are wholly evil and who are consistently described as the exact opposites of the gods. The Avestan word *daēuua-* thus introduces an ontological category of beings which is unique to Zoroastrianism and can only be circumscribed.

The essential problem is a problem of translation: Plutarch has read or heard of a difference between two categories, *yazata* and *daēva*, of which the first one denotes good beings, headed by Ahura Mazdā, and the second one evil beings, headed by Angra Mainyu. He knew, moreover, that the latter will disappear, whereas Ahura Mazdā is eternal. When forced to use common Greek words to communicate this idea, the choice of θεός to render *yazata* seems perfectly logical, whereas the choice of δαίμων to render *daēva* is indeed the best option. Unfortunately, Plutarch's highly specialised opinions on the category "demon" are sometimes read into this translation of a substantially different Iranian category.

In the remainder of the two chapters from *De Iside*, Plutarch treats the good and the evil beings as gods and does not repeat the semantic precision he uses in this sentence; this also seems to find an explanation if one considers the meaning of the term "demon" in Plutarch's work. Although Plutarch repeatedly introduces Zoroaster as one of the first teachers who taught that there is an intermediary class of beings (demons) between gods and men, his knowledge of the nature of Angra Mainyu in the Persian religion must have led him to regard Angra Mainyu as a god rather than a demon. Elsewhere, however, he refers to Angra Mainyu as the evil demon of the Persians.[34]

Plutarch's use of the comparative "better" for the designation of the good spirit, has often been connected with Zarathustra's Gāthās.[35] In the language of the Gāthās, the comparative and superlative are frequently used in descriptions of both the good and the evil powers and a usage such as "the better and the bad" occurs several times.[36] Plutarch thus may have been influenced by a typical Zoroastrian expression. If Plutarch really reproduces a Zoroastrian expression, he must have relied on excellent scriptural sources (of which no other trace survives). The following two chapters of *De Iside* then should bear further evidence of such a state of affairs. If they do not give such evidence, it may be better to attribute the choice of words to Plutarch's own stylistic qualities.

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[34] *Life of Alexander* 30; cf. ch. 4.2.1.

[35] Moulton, *EZ*, 399, n. 1, was the first to draw attention to this.

[36] E.g. Y. 30.3: "the better and the bad" (*vahiiō akəmcā*); Y. 45.2, "the holier and the evil" (*spaṅiiå ... aṇgrəm*).

The second dualist system, attributing good and evil to a god and a demon in exact opposition, is attributed to Zoroaster the Magus. Zoroaster's name and his title are those commonly found in Greek literature. Some manuscripts for the present passage also give the variant Ζωρόαστρις, known from other sources such as Hippolytus, *Elenchus* 5.14.8 and Zosimus the Alchemist.[37]

The appellation of Zoroaster as 'the Magus' is much rarer than is sometimes assumed; it appears here for the first time in Greek literature. In the later tradition it is used by Eusebius[38] and in some of the stories on Zaratas the Magus, the teacher of Pythagoras.[39] That Zoroaster was perceived to be the first of the Magi, however, is a common enough tradition, and—in view of the claim of the Zoroastrian priesthood that the entire Avesta derives from Zoroaster—substantially correct.

The date Plutarch gives for Zoroaster, 5,000 years before the Trojan war, is commonly attributed to Hermodorus on the evidence of Diogenes Laertius.[40] Together with a dating 6,000 years before Plato, presumably going back to Eudoxus of Cnidus,[41] it is the best known "mythical" dating of Zoroaster's life (for which, cf. ch. 4.3).

He used to call the one Horomazes and the other Areimanius, and showed also that the former was especially akin, among objects of perception, to light, and the latter, on the contrary, to darkness and ignorance,

Having described the essential background of the two spirits (the god and the demon), Plutarch proceeds by giving the names accorded to them by Zoroaster. The good god is called Ὡρομάζης, the traditional Greek rendering of Ahura Mazdā, current at least in the fourth century BCE in the circles of the Academy, transmitted by Pseudo-Plato, Aristotle and others.[42] The evil spirit is called 'Αϱειμάνιος, which is equally traditional in Greek, but not as well attested.[43]

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[37] Texts in Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 86 (Hippolytus) and I, 247 (Zosimus). There does not seem to be much philological reality behind this form; the suggestion by Bidez and Cumont that it has been influenced by the many Graeco-Egyptian names in *-is* seems entirely satisfactory.

[38] *Praeparatio Evangelica* 10.9.10, presumably influenced by Philo of Byblus, who is quoted using the same appellation in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.42.

[39] Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, texts B 29a-b (*Suda* and a *Scholium on Plato's Republic*).

[40] Diogenes Laertius 1.2. Cf. Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 8, n. 3.

[41] Pliny, *Natural History* 30.3. Cf. Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 9 and 11, n. 5.

Zoroaster taught that Ahura Mazdā resembles light more than anything else perceived by the senses and Angra Mainyu darkness and ignorance. The symbolism of light and darkness denoting positive and negative worlds or realms of existence can only be partially found in the Avesta.[44] In the Gāthās, the symbolism of light and darkness is not very prominent, except for Y. 31.20, where the reward for the righteous is "splendour" and for the unrighteous "a long life in darkness." In the Younger Avesta, there is a larger amount of texts and passages using the symbolism of light and darkness: the daevas are "the offspring of darkness" (Yt. 6.4) and their realm is called by a variety of words reflecting darkness.[45] Similarly, the good creation is associated with light, again specifically the realm of the blessed souls, which as a standing epithet has *raoxšna-*, "light, radiant."[46] Many epithets of divinities stress their radiance and light;[47] epithets stressing the darkness of the *daevas* are lacking (with the exception of those adjectives mentioned above).

The symbolic representation of good and evil in terms of light and darkness grew more and more important in the development of the tradition. The Pahlavi books contain many passages in which the two worlds and the two spirits are described in these terms. The most obvious (and often quoted) passage to compare Plutarch's statements with is the beginning of the *Greater Bundahišn*, the longest cosmogonical work from Zoroastrian literature, which obviously preserves lost parts of the Avesta. It is therefore frequently used for the reconstruction of early historical Zoroastrianism: “Ohrmazd was on high within the light, with omniscience and goodness, [which is] infinite time. That light is the throne and the place of Ohrmazd; some call it infinite light. [...] Ahreman was deep under within the darkness with late knowledge and contentiousness. Some say he is not. [...] darkness is his place. Some call it infinite darkness. Between them was void. Some call it Wāy, in which is the mixture of the two, infinity and finitude.”[48]

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[42] Cf. ch. 4.1.1.

[43] Cf. ch. 4.2.1.

[44] G. Kreyenbroek, 'Voorstellingen over licht en donker in het oude Iran', in: R. Stuip & C. Vellekoop (eds.), *Licht en donker in de Middeleeuwen* (Utrechtse Bijdragen tot de Mediëvistiek 9), Utrecht 1989, 21-27.

[45] "He shall go to that existence which belongs to the unrighteous, made of darkness, offspring of darkness, dark." *təm ahūm paiθiiāiti yim druuatąm təmaŋhaēnəm təmasciθrəm təmaŋhəm*, Vd. 5.62.

[46] Cf. Yt. 10.123-124, where Ahura Mazdā performs a sacrifice to Mithra "in the radiant Garō-nmāna," his eternal abode.

[47] *xšaēta-*, "shining" (Apąm Napāt, Anāhitā, Aši etc.), *bānumaitī-*, "radiant" (Aši), *viiāuuaṇt-* (Tištrya, Aši), *bāmiia-*, "radiant" (Fravašis), *frādərəsra-* "translucent" (Tištrya), etc. Several separate divinities symbolising light are also known, for instance Anaghra Raocah (Boundless Light), Bāmyā (Radiant) and Ušah (Dawn).

In the *Greater Bundahišn*, the cosmogony thus begins in almost the same fashion as in Plutarch’s description, by mentioning the two spirits and their characteristic elements, light and darkness. This is where most previous commentators have ended their interpretation, satisfied by Plutarch’s general correctness: a connection between Ahura Mazdā and light and between Angra Mainyu and darkness. If interpreted this way, however, it is very unsatisfactory; Plutarch’s wording betrays a Platonist view of Oriental religions which, if taken literally, reflects little of the traditions themselves.

In most varieties of Platonism it was considered impossible to believe that sense-perception could be instrumental in gaining knowledge of the divine; in other words, one cannot use the senses or the results of sense-perception to learn about the nature of the gods. Plutarch evidently was of the same opinion. He praises Pythagoras for teaching that “the first principle was beyond sense or feeling, was invisible and uncreated and discernible only by the mind”.[49] Similarly, he introduces his teacher Ammonius to say that it is a good thing that people think that Apollo is the Sun, for it shows their loving care for this divinity, but it is also silly and they should learn that it is only proper to speak of Apollo in association with the Sun. He is not the sun, but the sun is only an aid in gaining knowledge of the god.[50] Throughout Plutarch’s work there is a rigid (Platonic) distinction between knowledge deriving from sense-perception (αἰσθητός) and knowledge deriving from reason (νοητός). What can be apprehended through sense-perception is subject to change and not to be connected in reality with the supreme god. What can be apprehended by reason is eternal and the only way of understanding the divine.[51] Plutarch introduces these terms also in his description of Zoroaster's teachings; this strongly suggests that his interpretation of these teachings are an *interpretatio platonica* of Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster the Magus did not, according to Plutarch, teach that the supreme god *was* light, but that he *resembled* light more than anything else from the realm of sense-perception. In reality, we are then quite far removed from Zoroastrianism, where the philosophical intricacies of speaking of the divine were never developed in this direction. In the case of Angra Mainyu this is even more evident, for darkness is said to be his essence. We must remain alert, therefore, for similar Platonising interpretations of Zoroastrian doctrine.

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[48] GBd. 1.1-5; the translation follows S. Shaked, ‘Mihr the Judge’, 29-30.

[49] *Life of Numa* 8.7.

[50] *De E apud Delphos* 393DE.

The final qualification Plutarch attributes to Areimanios is ignorance, ἄγνοια. In the Avesta, Angra Mainyu, the daēvas and the evil believers are often described with the adjective *duždā-*, "of evil knowledge",[52] as opposed to *hudā-*, "knowing well," applied to the Amesha Spentas, divinities and righteous believers. In the Pahlavi books, Ahreman is generally introduced as suffering from *(a)pasdānišnīh*, "after-knowledge", a disposition which prevents him from knowing things beforehand. This figures prominently in the passage from the *Bundahišn* quoted above. It is an attractive possibility that the structural likenesses between Plutarch's short description of the primal situation and the beginning of the *Bundahišn* are due to a use Plutarch could make of a source which transmitted a version of the Zoroastrian cosmogony very much like the one preserved in the *Bundahišn*. This, however, is a matter for speculation, because we do not know the antiquity of this cosmogony and we do not know Plutarch's sources.

while in between the two was Mithras; and this is why the Persians call the Mediator Mithras.

There is hardly any passage on the Persian religion in Classical literature that has been discussed as intensively as this short sentence in Plutarch's description of the religion of the Persians. In order to do justice to this discussion and to evaluate the meaning of this passage for the history of Zoroastrianism, it is necessary to go into the problem and the solutions proposed in greater detail.

The first problem is the correct translation of the passage διὸ καὶ Μίθρην Πέρσαι τὸν Μεσίτην ὀνομάζουσιν. As Mansfeld was the first to suggest explicitly, this passage must be translated "That is why the Persians call the Mediator Mithras."[53] Almost all previous interpreters had translated the passage "That is why the Persians call Mithras the Mediator". Either translation has important implications. If the passage is translated "That is why the Persians call Mithras the Mediator," this implies that Plutarch interprets an Iranian appellative for the divinity Mithras. If Mansfeld's translation is correct, this implies that Plutarch introduces a meaningful category from his own philosophical system and applies this category to the Persian divinity Mithras, or illuminates the category by choosing the divinity who fits it best.

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[51] E.g. *De Defectu Oraculorum* 428BC; 428F; 435F-436A.

[52] Vd. 11.10; 19.12 etc.

Mansfeld's translation is based on the commonness of the Greek word μεσίτης, "umpire" and the presence of the definite article τόν before μεσίτην and the absence of the same before Μίθρην. This observation is particularly convincing because syntactically, the article before μεσίτην would present an oddity if a common appellative was introduced.[54]

A second observation, made by Turcan, is equally valuable. There is a marked change in tense in this passage: the description Plutarch gives of the teachings of Zoroaster is in the past tense (the preceding προσαπεφαίνετο and the following ἐδίδαξε) but this short interpretation of a Persian divinity is in the present. It has therefore been seen as a learned aside, a personal interpretation of Plutarch (as opposed to the information he had from his sources).[55]

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[53] J. Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context. Hippolytus'* Elenchos *as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Philosophia Antiqua 56), Leiden 1992, 281-282 with nn. 128-130. The same translation was, incidentally, already proposed by W. Lentz, 'Plutarch und der Zerwanismus', 120, without, however, justifying the translation or taking into account its implications.

[54] Usually in similar sentences, however, the syntactical order is different, with the "named" introduced first (with article) and the "name" afterwards (without article): διὸ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἑρμοῦ πόλει Μουσῶν τὴν προτέραν Ἶσιν ἅμα καὶ Δικαιοσύνην καλοῦσι (352 B); τινὲς δὲ τὸν μὲν παῖδα καλεῖσθαι Πηλούσιον (357E); τὸν γὰρ Ὠκεανὸν Ὄσιριν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ Τηθὺν Ἶσιν (364D). The word order as in the passage on Mithras is also followed, both in addition to the reverse order (δοκῶ δ' ἔγωγε καὶ τὸ τὴν μονάδα τοὺς ἄνδρας ὀνομάζειν Ἀπόλλωνα, καὶ τὴν δυάδα Ἄρτεμιν, Ἀθηνᾶν δὲ τὴν ἑβδομάδα, Ποσειδῶνα δὲ τὸν πρῶτον κύβον κτλ. (354E), and separately: ἀπέπαυσε δὲ τὴν Πυθίαν ὁ θεὸς πυρικάους μεν ὀνομάζουσαν τοὺς αὑτῆς πολίτας, ὀφιοβόρους δὲ τοὺς Σπαρτιάτας, ὀρεᾶνας δὲ τοὺς ἄνδρας, ὀρεμπότας δὲ τοὺς ποταμούς. (*De Defectu Oraculorum* 406E). An exception appears to be οὐ γὰρ τὸν κύνα κυρίως Ἑρμῆν λέγουσιν (*De Iside* 355B), unless one would translate this as "for they do not call the dog Hermes in a literal sense." Hopfner, *Isis und Osiris*, vol. 2, p. 9, n. 3, emends the text by transferring the article from κύνα to Ἑρμῆν.

For the perplexing appellation of Mithras as Mediator, as it was previously understood, several explanations have been offered. It has been interpreted by making grammatical-etymological, physical and doctrinal or moral connections with the Iranian texts.

The grammatical explanations focus on the word μεσίτης and its possible Iranian synonyms or backgrounds. The OP form of Mithra's name was **Miça* and has been attested thus in Elamite and in Aramaic names.[56] It has thus been suggested as a possibility that a Greek author who knew of Mithra's OP name thought of it as an epithet and connected it, in the usual Greek manner of etymologising, with Greek μέσος.[57]

Another grammatical-etymological argument focuses on the fact that Mithra is said to perform *mayānjīgīh* in many Pahlavi texts. This term, formed from *mayān*, "middle," is often interpreted as "mediation" and its agent noun *mayānjīg* as "mediator." It has been suggested that it actually means "arbitration" or "judgment."[58] On the basis of this meaning, it was argued that "the Greek term is a direct rendering of the Iranian predecessor of the Pahlavi *miyāncīg*, applied to Mithra, as we have seen, in his function of a judge."[59] Since μεσίτης means "arbitrator" and "umpire" anyway, the Greek word could also be a "translation" of other appellatives that present Mithra as the judge (such as the common *dādwarīh*, a word frequently used together with *mayānjīgīh*). It seems therefore a distinct possibility that it is in this judicial context that the link between Mithra and μεσίτης originated.[60]

The physical explanations of Mithra the Mediator have involved many instances in which Mithra is somewhere in the middle. Thus it was stressed that Mithra was between night and day, between summer and winter, between heaven and hell.[61] More elaborate suggestions were also proposed: the opening passage of the *Bundahišn* quoted above specifically mentions a realm between Ohrmazd and Ahreman, and occupied by the good Wāy, the divinity of air or wind. Since, however, air and light are indissolubly linked, Mithra's function as god of light could have inspired his middle position.[62] Similarly, the middle position of Mithra was recognised in the Zoroastrian calendar, where he occupies the 16th day and the 7th month.[63] Finally, Mithra's association with the sun and the middle position of the sun among the planets according to the so-called "Chaldean" speculations were also adduced.[64]

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[55] Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*, 14.

[56] For the Elamite names, cf. Mayrhofer, *On Pers.* 8.321; 8.449; 8.589 etc. The name *Mspt*, attested in Aramaic was interpreted by W. Eilers, 'Neue Aramäische Urkunden aus Ägypten', *AfO* 17 (1954-56), 322-335, p. 332, as *Miçapāta-*. Cf. Mayrhofer, *On. Pers.* 8.1138.

[57] Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*, 18.

[58] Shaked, 'Mihr the Judge', *passim*; cf. *HZ* III, 478-479.

[59] Shaked, 'Mihr the Judge', 15.

[60] Oepke, 'μεσίτης', 609, even argued that the reason that no known Iranian epithet is a translation of μεσίτης (which, given the compelling arguments brought forward by Shaked, is no longer true), was due to the fact that Mithra's own name (meaning "contract") was translated thus; this, however, is very unlikely.

This connection with the sun is also important for the doctrinal explanations of Mithra's position as mediator. Several suggestions have again been made. An important link appears to be that with a story related by Eznik of Kołb: when Ahreman invited Ohrmazd to a feast, Ohrmazd refused to come, unless their sons would fight first. Ahreman's son won the fight, but when both spirits looked for an arbitrator, they could not find one. Therefore, they created the Sun to be a judge over them.[65] Nyberg elaborated upon this theme by suggesting that the name of the demon who told Ohrmazd how to create light, Mahmi, would have been identical with Mithra, and that his name could be explained as OIr. **maδmiya*, "the one in the middle."[66] Other explanations have stressed Mithra's function as psychopomp[67] or as guardian of the pact between the good and the evil spirit, as he is described in the *Bundahišn*.[68]

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[61] E.g. Moulton, *EZ*, 65-67; 141.

[62] Hani, 'Plutarque en face du dualisme iranien', 195 with nn. 16-19; Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 73-74, n. 6.

[63] Merkelbach, *Mithras*, 27; but cf. *HZ* III, 479, n. 585.

[64] Cumont, *TMMM* I, 303; for the origin of the so-called "Chaldean" speculations, cf. R. Gordon, 'Franz Cumont and the Doctrines of Mithraism', in: Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies*, 215-247, pp. 228-230; R. Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (EPRO 109), Leiden 1988, 1-11.

[65] That Mithra is here presented as the Sun is commonly accepted; cf. Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 89-90; Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 101-103 and text F11.

[66] Nyberg, *Religionen*, 385-386.

[67] Cf. Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 157-158. The argument was sometimes based on the passage *MX* 2.117-120, where Mithra (together with Sraoša and Rašnu) is said to perform *mayānjīgīh*, which was then understood as mediation. For the correct interpretation of the term, cf. Shaked, 'Mihr the Judge'.

[68] Cf. Kreyenbroek, 'Mithra and Ahreman, Binyāmīn and Malak Ṭāwūs', 58-59 with n. 3.

The most intricate reconstruction is that based on Yt. 11.14, where it is said that Sraoša "watches over the truces and treaties between the *Drug* and the Most Bounteous (Spirit)."[69] Benveniste argued that this function of Sraoša originally belonged to Mithra, and that it is only here that Mithra's original function as guardian of the pacts *between the good and the evil spirit* emerges.[70] It is especially interesting to note that Sraoša appears to be the divinity to whom a concept of mediation between gods and men can best be attributed.[71] Whether this function has anything to do with the character of Mithra in the Zurvanite scheme, as Benveniste argued, is dubious. Finally, Zaehner suggested that Mithra's role as mediator was inspired by the earthly functions of Mithra as hero-god in the Mithraic mysteries.[72]

In order to evaluate these explanations, several questions are important. The first question is the meaning of the Greek word μεσίτης. The translation of this word as "mediator" has specifically Christian connotations, which cannot be present in Plutarch's writings. Μεσίτης has several distinct meanings, the most important of which are "umpire", "arbitrator" or "surety," all terms which express the impartial, medial position between two parties in a juridical context; its synonyms in this meaning are words as διαλλακτήϱ, διαιτητής, ἐγγυητής. The translation "mediator" of the word is therefore in many cases to be specified as "mediator between two parties, who guarantees that treaties are kept or that conflicts are settled in an impartial, just manner".[73] Μεσίτης can also denote a central position, although this meaning is rare (and possibly due to a conflation with μεσότης). It is especially in Hellenistic Jewish and in Early Christian literature that the word gains a specific meaning as "mediator" between two specifically unequal parties, one divine, the other human. The term is never used by Plutarch in this sense; to express such a mediating figure between god and men, Plutarch uses the word δαίμων.

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[69] Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, 65; 102; 169 with n. 22.

[70] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 91-93. That Sraoša indeed took over many of Mithra's functions is commonly assumed. Cf. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, 165-167. For Mithra as guardian of the pact between the two spirits, cf. for instance *ZWY* 7.31-32.

[71] Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, 129-130.

[72] Zaehner, *Dawn and Twilight*, 123-125; a similar idea was already put forward by Gray, *Foundations*, 95, who argued that "before the transformation of Angra Mainyu from an earth-god and underworld-deity into a devil there was a triad of Ahura Mazda (sky), Mithra (sun as symbolical on the intermediate space) and Angra Mainyu (earth)."

[73] Oepke, 'μεσίτης', gives many references to the use of the different meanings of the word.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the middle position Mithra occupies is physical or ethical from the passage under consideration only. A physical interpretation seems a distinct possibility in view of the fact that Plutarch's conclusion elaborates upon the previous sentence that "between the two (μέσον δ' ἀμφοῖν) there is Mithras." The problem is that Plutarch does not accord a special position (or localisation) to the good or the evil spirit. The passage is also reminiscent of *Symposium* 202E, where Plato describes the *Daimonion* as a being "between the god and the mortal" (μεταξὺ θεοῦ τε καῖ θνητοῦ), complementing both spheres and unifying them into one whole.

A possible answer to what Plutarch means in this passage, may be found in the following chapters of *De Iside*. The Chaldaeans divide the planets in two good ones, two evil ones, and three intermediary ones, sharing both natures (ch. 48).[74] Plato himself is credited with a similar view, "that the cosmos is moved not by one soul, but probably by more, and at least by no fewer than two. Of these he states that one is beneficent and the other is opposed to it and is the creator of opposed qualities. He leaves room for a certain third nature also to exist between them, one which is neither inanimate, nor without reason nor unable to move of itself, as some think, but which depends on the other two, and constantly desires and longs for and pursues what is better."[75] It seems not too farfetched to suppose that this third nature, which Plutarch obviously considered of great importance for his philosophical system, corresponds to Mithras. This is mirrored in the explanation of the Egyptian myths Plutarch interprets. It is clear that Osiris is the same as Ahura Mazdā, being both essentially good and eternal. Seth-Typhon is to be equated with Angra Mainyu, being both evil and destructive (and ignorant). The middle force, introduced as Mithras among the Iranians, would then correspond to Isis, and would have to be dependent on both, but desiring for the better.[76] It appears, then, that Plutarch's information on Mithras cannot be disentangled from the point he is trying to make: the existence of a third nature (cf. also ch. 3.3.1). The many parallels to Mithra's middle position and to his juridical aspects can then all be significant for Plutarch's choice of Mithra as the Iranian representative of the middle nature that was so pivotal to his philosophical system.

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[74] Cf. S.M. Chiodi, 'Il dualismo caldeo secondo Plutarco', in: G. Sfameni Gasparro (ed.), 'Αγαθὴ ἐλπίς. *Studi storico-religiosi in onore di Ugo Bianchi* (Storia delle Religioni 11), Roma 1994, 269-283.

[75] *De Iside* 48.370F, translation Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside*, 197. The reference to Plato is to *Laws* 896Dff.

[76] R.E. Witt, 'Some Thoughts on Isis in Relation to Mithras', in Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies*, 479-493.

He also taught that votive- and thank-offerings should be made to Horomazes, but gloomy offerings to Areimanius, and those intended to avert evil. For they pound a certain herb called omōmi in a mortar, invoking Hades and darkness, and then after mixing with it the blood of a slain wolf, they take it out to a sunless spot and throw it away.

This passage is also very problematic and often discussed. Plutarch probably included this passage in his treatment of Zoroastrianism because he was interested in the possibilities of ritual as vehicle of knowledge of the Supreme Good. In the religion of the Persians he had found the classical homeland of dualism; he demonstrates the implications of this dualism at all levels: cosmogony, theogony, cosmology, ritual and mythology. The information he gives on the ritual, however, is in sharp contrast with all that is known of Zoroastrianism in any period: offerings, of whatever nature, to the Evil spirit are strictly forbidden in all varieties of Zoroastrianism.

Most interpretations stress this fact and use it to attribute the rituals described by Plutarch to a different religion: according to Benveniste, it was a Zurvanite ritual.[77] His main reason to think so was his assumption that Zurvanites held Angra Mainyu in the same esteem as Ahura Mazdā, because they were brothers and shared the same powers. There is nothing to substantiate such an assumption. The idea that Plutarch describes a Zurvanite ritual has therefore been generally abandoned.

Another attempt, interesting in itself, was to attribute the rite to "the permanence of tellurian piety" among certain Zoroastrians.[78] It is not entirely clear what this should mean, particularly because the description of Plutarch—who is the only authority to refer to such a ritual—does not present the ritual as a chthonic offering, but as an apotropaic ritual.[79] Colpe's reconstruction of a coalescence of Hades, Angra Mainyu, Spenta Ārmaiti and Aryaman to provide Angra Mainyu with a chthonic nature, lacks cogency.

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[77] *Persian Religion* 73-75; 'Un rite zervanite chez Plutarque' *passim*.

[78] C. Colpe in *CHI* 3, 829-830.

[79] Boyce and Grenet, *HZ* III, 457-458; 168-171, have drawn attention to pos-

The most influential interpretation of the passage is that of R.C. Zaehner. In his *Zurvan* we meet an underground sect of sorcerers and devil-worshippers, who performed secret rituals which were a wilful inversion of the sacred Zoroastrian rituals, devoted to the worship of Ahreman and the *daēvas*. This sect was a survival of a once legitimate religion current among the Iranians, devoted to the worship of the *daēvas*, who were eventually dethroned by Zarathustra. The Achaemenian king Xerxes perhaps tried to remove the last remnants of this ancient faith (as could be deduced from his *daiva*-inscription), but he was not entirely successful, as Plutarch's description of the sacrifices to Ahreman shows.[80]

Zaehner used as sources for his reconstruction texts discussing the rituals, organisation and customs of the *daēva*-worshippers in Avestan and Pahlavi. There are innumerable texts that discuss these subjects and Zaehner took them all literally: a sect of sorcerers existed, who invoked Ahreman, kept their religion secret, used their own devilish revelation and engaged in nightly cults. That these same devil-worshippers were said to keep their bodies covered in human excrement and to live on a diet of putrefying human flesh did not deter him from such an interpretation.

Another way to look at these texts would be to see them as texts written in a "language of estrangement,"[81] an upside-down vocabulary, where those accused are said to do exactly the opposite of what believing and observing Zoroastrians are expected to do: devil-worshippers cover their bodies with excrement, Zoroastrians keep themselves clean and pure; devil-worshippers and sorcerers do everything they do in great secrecy and at night,

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sible chthonic cults in Central Asia, but they have, correctly I believe, not identified Ahreman as a possible recipient of such offerings.

[80] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 13-18.

[81] Cf. J.Z. Smith, 'Towards interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity', *ANRW* II.16.1 (1978), 425-439, p. 425: ['Devil Worship'] "is so rare as a first-person statement within the history of religions to be of all but negligible interest. [...] 'Devil worship' is a term of estrangement applied to others and represents a reduction of their religiosity to the category of the *false* but not (it is essential to emphasize) to the category of the *impotent*." Important aspects of the problems with which we are concerned are also treated by C.R. Phillips III, 'The Sociology of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire to A.D. 284', *ANRW* II.16.3 (1986), 2677-2773.

Zoroastrians say their prayers in public, facing the sun; the devil-worshippers chant services to the *daēvas*, the observant Zoroastrians to the gods etc.

Although it is likely that there were individuals who attempted to invoke the evil powers and to perform rituals in their honour (these beings after all were felt to be extremely powerful), there is no reason to think that there was a specific sect devoted to such practices. It is very questionable, therefore, that Plutarch refers to such a sect.

Most scholars who have interpreted the passage have treated Plutarch and the Zoroastrian texts on the devil-worshippers as two independent sources: this enables them to prove the correctness of either by referring to the existence of the other source. Plutarch, however, never met Zoroastrians; he relies entirely on written sources. The sources he used were excellent, as he transmits typically priestly knowledge. The texts on the devil-worshippers in the Avesta and the Pahlavi books are also part of these priestly traditions. We have no serious reason to doubt that most priests, as probably most Zoroastrians, actually believed that the devil-worshippers existed. After all, they constantly write about them. It is therefore likely that Plutarch's information on devil-worshippers among the Persians does not derive from an independent devil-worshipping source, but from exactly the same sources which are so frequently used to show Plutarch right: Zoroastrian polemics against a nonexistent group of devil-worshippers.[82]

The elements of the ritual as described by Plutarch are almost all to be found in these sources: the offering of a slaughtered wolf is mentioned in *N.* 59 (Waag) as part of *daēvic* rituals; the wolf replaces the beneficent animal in the sacrificial rituals. The sunless spot where the gruesome libation is poured out alludes to the fact that the devil-worshippers prefer darkness and perform their rituals under the ground, in caves, and at night. The invocations of the Evil spirit and of Darkness replace the invocations of Ahura Mazdā and Fire; they are standard elements in descriptions of *daēva*-worshippers.

The only problematic aspect is the herb that is mixed with the wolf's blood: ομωμι. Benveniste's suggestion that it should be the aromatic *amomum*[83] seems very attractive, as long as it is any other plant than Haoma, which was used in the Zoroastrian rituals. If, as some Arabic sources suggest, the *amomum* gives off a thick smoke when burnt, there may have been a ritual reason to proscribe its use. A parallel case is that of the juniper, a plant that gives off very thick smoke when burnt and the use of which is condemned in Yt. 14.55 (cf. below). As long as evidence to the contrary is not found, it seems best to suggest that Plutarch's description of devil-worshipping rituals among the Zoroastrians ultimately derives from Zoroastrian polemics against imaginary rituals of an imaginary sect.

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[82] Plutarch attributes the origin of the *daēvic* rituals to Zoroaster. This would seem normal practice for him if he used a source that pretended to describe Zoroastrian affairs, and thus does not prove that there were Zoroastrians who did in reality perform these rituals.

They believe that among plants too, some belong to the good god and others to the evil demon, and that among animals some, such as dogs, birds and land hedgehogs, belong to the good god, whereas water-rats belong to the bad deity, and for this reason they regard as happy whoever kills a great number of them.

Plutarch's statement that there are good and evil plants is unique and may have been influenced by his wish to discover the radical practicalities of Zoroaster's dualism. Although it is possible that some Zoroastrians held that there were good and evil plants (just as there are good and evil animals), traces of this idea cannot be found in Zoroastrian texts. There are no traces of the existence of evil plants in Zoroastrian literature; the plants that can be identified from the Avesta are not divided in good and evil species (as are the animals), but it is the use made of these plants that informs their ethical qualities.[84] In Yt. 14.55, for instance, a ritual is described thus: "For now the Vyāmbura daēvas, the devil-worshipping men, put on the fire of that plant which is called Haperesī by name, that fuel wood that is called Nemedhka by name."[85] There is nothing in this text that suggests that the plants mentioned are evil plants; their use as wood for the fire is prohibited. This is even more clear in the case of plants that procure abortion mentioned in Vd. 15.14,[86] for among them is the hemp (Av. *baŋha-*, Phl. *mang*), which, although not spoken of favourably in the Vendidād,[87] is consumed by some of the holiest men of the Zoroastrian tradition (Vištāspa and Ardā Wīrāz)[88] and can therefore not have been wholly evil. The same is apparently true for the second plant mentioned in this list, the *šaēta-*, for the PhlVd. renders it as *šēd* (an unknown plant name)[89] and then interprets *mang* and *šēd* as "the one the (plant) of Wištāspa, the other the (plant) of Zarathustra."[90] In the Zoroastrian cosmogony, moreover, Ahreman creates as countercreation to the animal kingdom the evil creatures (*xrafstars*), but a similar countercreation of evil plants is unknown. The *Bundahišn* gives as the evil countercreation to plants the fact that they develop bark and thorns.[91]

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[83] Benveniste, 'Rite zervanite', *passim.*

[84] For all plant-lore in the Avesta, cf. D.S. Flattery & M. Schwartz, *Haoma and Harmaline. The Botanical Identity of the Sacred Hallucinogen "Soma" and its Legacy in Religion, Language and Middle Eastern Folklore* (Near Eastern Studies 21), Berkeley etc. 1989.

[85] *yat̰ nūrəm viiāmbura daēuua maṣ̌iiāka daēuuaiiāzō auui ātrəm ābarəṇti aētaiiå uruuaraiiå yā vaoce hapərəsi nąma aētəm aēsməm yō vaoce nəməδka nąma.* H.W. Bailey, 'Plant Names', *CHI* 2, 870-3, interprets the Haperesī as the *Juniper* (cf. NP *burs* and Paštō *oboẋta*), the Nemedhkā possibly as the *Viburnum Lantana* (which is the plant indicated by Oss *nymætk'u*, but plant names are transferred easily). For

That the Persians believed in the existence of two different classes of living beings, good and evil, is easier to demonstrate. It is not only known from many Iranian sources, but also from several Classical passages (cf. ch. 4.4.3). Plutarch seems to have had a special interest in the evil creatures; he mentions them not only in the passage under consideration, but also in *De Invidia et Odio* 3.537B and in the *Quaestiones Conviviales* IV.670D.

The animals created by the evil spirit are known as *xrafstra* (Phl. *xrafstar*) and they are frequently mentioned in the Avesta and in the Pahlavi books. Plutarch's specification of the species

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the entire passage, cf. M. Schwartz, 'Viiāmburas and Kafirs', in: *Aspects of Iranian Culture. In Honor of Richard Nelson Frye*, BAI NS 4 (1990) 251-255.

[86] The plants mentioned are *baŋha-*, *šaēta-*, *γnāna-* and *fraspāta-*. Only the first of these has been identified with certainty as "hemp."

[87] H.S. Nyberg, *Religionen*, 178.

[88] *AWN* 2; *PhlRDd* 47.15-17; *Dk*. 7.4.83-87.

[89] Phl. *šēd* is known as a word for a certain type of horse (sorrel), indicating the reddish-brown colour: DkM 638.22f.: *šēd asb ī Wištāspān*, the sorrel horse of Wištāspa (who turned into the black horse of *ZN* 942-1094). M. Schwartz, *CHI* 2, 654, n. 1, compares the Soghdian verbs *nš'y-* and *βš'y-*, "to abort", "to expel," which seem to contain the same root as the plant name *šaēta*.

[90] PhlVd. 15.14: *Mang ayāb šēd [ēk ān ī Wištāspān ēk ān ī Zarduštān]*. The other two plants, *γnāna-* and *fraspāta-* are interpreted as if they were verb forms: *zanēd [kū andar aškamb be-ōzānēd] ayāb frāz-abganišnīh [kū be-āyēd pas be-mīrēd]*: "she strikes [she kills what is inside her womb], or drives it out [that (it) comes and then dies]."

[91] *GBd*. 16.1 (TD$_1$ fol. 47r.9-10): *gowēd pad dēn kū pēš az madan ī ān ī ēbgat urwar xār ud pōst padiš nē būd*. "It is said in the religion that before the coming of the evil one, there was no thorn or bark on the plant."

belonging to the good and to the evil spirit are also generally correct.

That the dog is among the creatures of the good spirit cannot only be found in the Avesta[92] and in the Pahlavi texts,[93] but also appears to have been common knowledge among the Greeks. They are specifically mentioned by Herodotus as the animals the Magi do *not* kill (*Histories* 1.140), and their special position is recorded with amazement in the *Paradoxographus Vaticanus*.[94] Their presence is mandatory in several rituals, particularly in the rituals of purification (the *barešnum*) and in the rituals surrounding death (*sagdīd*);[95] proper care is to be taken of a dog at all times and at all costs.

That birds belong to the good creation is also clear from the Avesta: many mythical and real birds are described in laudatory terms. The divinity Verethraghna takes the shape of a *Vārəgan*-bird, the feathers of which possess magical qualities (Yt. 14.19-21; 35-6), the *Saēna*-bird is said to come to the tree of all seeds in the middle of lake Vourukaša (Yt. 12.17; 14.41); the vultures, important for their role in the funerary practices, also belong to the good creation, which is clear from the fact that the hero Thraētaona takes the shape of a vulture in Yt. 5.61. The cockerel is the special bird of the divinity Sraoša and is much praised because its cry is thought to be instrumental in the battle against the daēvas at night.[96] The only bird that is anywhere said to have been created by the evil spirit is the peacock, but the mythical story in which this is related[97] obviously reflects developments in

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[92] The entire chapter 12 of the Vendidād is devoted to the dog as a holy animal. Note, however, that all kinds of creatures (the hedgehog, the dog, the otter etc.) are called "dog" in the Avesta.

[93] Cf. the severe punishment in hell for the person who did not feed the dog while he was alive, or hit or killed a dog: *AWN* 48.

[94] Paradoxographus Vaticanus 29: Πέρσαι τοῖς οἰκείοις κυσὶ βοράν, <οἵαν> τοῖς πλουσίοις καὶ ἐνδόξοις, τιθέασιν: "The Persians give such food to their domestic dogs as (one would give) to rich and honourable people." A. Giannini, *Paradoxographorum Graecorum Reliquiae*, Milano 1955, 340-341. The date and background of the information in the paradoxographers is difficult to assess. The fragment from the *Paradoxographus Vaticanus* is astonishingly correct, if compared to the practice of the *com i šwa* ("meal of the dog") of the Irani Zoroastrians: before the faithful themselves eat, they give part of their meal to the dog. Cf. Boyce, *Stronghold*, 143-144.

[95] For these rituals and the place of the dog in them, cf. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 23-52; Modi, *CC*, 102-153.

[96] Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, 118; 172; Vd. 18.14-16.

[97] Eznik of Kołb, *De Deo* 2.8 (Langlois II, p. 380) = Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 438. Cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 309.

Zoroastrian doctrine that are not found in the Avesta or in the Pahlavi books.[98]

Plutarch finally mentions the hedgehog as a good creature. He repeats this information in *Quaestiones Convivivioles* 4.2.670D. It is entirely correct; it reflects the information of Vd. 13.1-4, where the hedgehog is praised as the "dog" that is busy during the night, killing thousands of the evil creatures. It is particularly praised because it kills many ants; the ants are important representatives of the noxious creatures attacking the good creation (Vd. 14.5; 16.12; 18.73).[99] Thus Plutarch's information derives from excellent sources, which may suggest that some Zoroastrians also believed in the existence of good and evil plants, as Plutarch indicates.

Plutarch mentions only one creature that belongs to the evil spirit, the mysterious ἔνυδρος μῦς. In *Quaestiones Conviviales* 4.2.670D he repeats this information, whereas in *De Invidia et Odio* 3.537B, he mentions the fact that the Persians kill the mouse or the rat (μῦς). The latter animal clearly belongs to the evil creatures.[100] The "rat living in the water," however, is an unknown species from the lists of *xrafstras* and various conjectures have been made. Benveniste suggested a connection with the *mus marinus* mentioned by Pliny as a species of tortoise; the tortoise is indeed recognised as a *xrafstra*.[101] Moulton clearly hesitated as to the meaning of the waterrat, but seems to follow Jackson in comparing the rat to the witch (*pairikā*) known as Mūš, "the Mouse."[102] Clemen, having briefly considered the sea-urchin, does not decide but suggests that Plutarch must have been correct in mentioning "water rats" in view of his general reliability in this passage.[103]

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[98] Cf. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 60, for some suggestions.

[99] Cf. *GBd*. 24.42 (*TD*$_1$ 64v11-13): *zūzag pad hamēstārīh ī mōr ī dān-keš dād ēstēd ciyōn gōwēd kū zūzag harw jār ka andar mōr āšyānag mēzēd 1,000 mōr be ōzanēd*. "The hedgehog was created in opposition to the corn-carrying ant, for it is said that every time a hedgehog urinates on an ant-heap, it kills 1,000 ants."

[100] Cf. SDB 43.9: *har ke mūšī bekošad candān kerfe bovad ke cahār šīr bekošte bāšad*. "Whoever kills a mouse/rat, will have as many virtue as when he would have killed four lions." The musk-rat (Phl. *mušk*) belonged to the good creatures: cf. *PhlRDd*. 16a4 (Williams), *GBd*. 13.21; 24.41. For rats etc. in ancient Iran, cf. J.J. Modi, 'The Rat Problem and the Ancients', in: J.J. Modi, *Anthropological Papers*, Bombay 1911, 355-365.

[101] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 75-76. Pliny, *Natural History* 9.35; 76. That the tortoise is a *xrafstra* is clear from *Vd*. 13.6; *PhlRDd*. 21a12 (Williams); *GBd*. 22.11. For the Gk word μῦς in the meaning tortoise, cf. D.W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Fishes*, London 1947, 167-168.

[102] Mūš occurs in Y. 16.8; 68.8; Moulton, *EZ*, 400, n. 3; Jackson, *GrIrPhil* II, 664; 666, n. 4.

Of all these theories, the suggestion put forward by Benveniste appears to be the most attractive, although the Greek ἔνυδρος μῦς is not attested in the meaning tortoise.[104] It remains, of course, distinctly possible that Plutarch is indeed referring to mice or rats, as he does in the *Quaestiones Conviviales*.

That the Persians praise him who has killed most of these noxious creatures is also repeated almost *verbatim* in *Quaestiones Conviviales* 4.2.670D: τὸν ἀποκτείνοντα πλείστους θεοφιλῆ καὶ μακάριον νομίζειν. The origin of this information may be sought in various sources. In Vd. 3.22, the third man who satisfies this earth with the greatest satisfaction is he who digs out the lairs of the creatures of the evil spirit. The existence of a festival of the killing of evil creatures, at which the person who has killed most wins a prize, is also mentioned by Agathias (*Histories* 2.24); such a festival was still remembered by the Zoroastrians of Iran in the present century.[105]

But they also relate many mythical details about the gods, and the following are instances. Horomazes is born from the purest light and Areimanius from darkness, and they are at war with one another.

The introductory sentence of ch. 47 gives the impression that what follows is not a systematic reflection of Zoroastrian doctrine (as ch. 46 may have been intended to be), but a collection of various myths with which such a system may be illustrated. This is of course difficult to prove, but there appears to be no logical order in ch. 47 of *De Iside*. Plutarch also gives two distinct versions of the Zoroastrian eschatology.

Ahura Mazdā is born or came into existence from the purest light. The pure lights are indeed where Ahura Mazdā is to be found. In a much-discussed passage from Damascius (quoting Eudemus), *Dubitationes et solutiones* 125bis, it is said that according to the Magi, the two spirits were separated from a primal unity, Space or Time. Some Magi, Damascius writes, held that *before* the two spirits, light and darkness were separated from this unity (cf.

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[103] Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 161-162.

[104] Cf. *LSJ*, s.v. μῦς III: the μῦς θαλάττιος (Aelianus, *De Natura Animalium* 9.41) apparently is the same as the Latin *mus marinus* (*ibid.*).

[105] *HZ* I, 299 with n. 26; cf. Boyce, *Stronghold*, 202.

ch. 4.4.2 for a discussion). Plutarch's statement that Ahura Mazdā *came into being* from the purest light is difficult to connect with most Zoroastrian speculations, which emphatically stress the fact that Ahura Mazdā is eternal. Nevertheless, there are indications that some Zoroastrians held a different view; it seems that both Plutarch and Damascius report on such an alternative tradition. The same evidently applies to Plutarch's statement that Angra Mainyu was born from darkness.

In all varieties of Zoroastrianism, light is the essence of Ahura Mazdā. An example can be found in the passage from the *Greater Bundahišn* quoted above, where the light (*rōšnīh*) is said to be the place where Ahura Mazdā lives, but even more so from another passage from the *Bundahišn* (1.44), where Ōhrmazd is said to have created the world "from his own essence, from the light existence" (*az ān ī xwēš xwadīh, az stī-rōšnīh*) and Ahreman his countercreation "from the dark existence, which is his own body" (*az stī-tārīkīh ī ān ī xwēš tan*). The two divinities wage war against each other, or fight one another. This reflects the doctrine of the Mixture (*gumēzišn*) in such well-known words that it is unnecessary to point out parallels. It is the basis of Zoroastrian views of cosmic history.

The former created six gods, the first being god of good will, the second god of truth, the third god of good order, and the others gods of wisdom and wealth, the sixth being the creator of pleasures in recompense for virtues. The other created an equal number as rivals to these.

When they went to battle, Ahura Mazdā made six gods. Together with Ahura Mazdā, these six make up the Heptad; they are called the Amesha Spentas (Av. *aməša- spəṇta-*, "beneficent immortal").[106] The Amesha Spentas are of great theological importance, for they are indissolubly linked with the Zoroastrian cosmogony. They are not frequently mentioned in non-Iranian reports on Zoroastrianism. There are attestations of individual Amesha Spentas,[107] but the doctrine of the Heptad, in spite of its great importance for Zoroastrian theology, can be found only very rarely in non-Zoroastrian literature (cf. ch. 4.1.2). This may be due to the fact that the Amesha Spentas did not play a great role in popular devotion, which is the basis of most foreign observations. As we saw earlier, Plutarch's description is based on a more systematic exposition of (priestly) Zoroastrian traditions, and here the Amesha Spentas characteristically are accorded a place of great importance.

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[106] For these divinities as a group, cf. J. Narten, *Die Aməša Spəṇtas im Avesta*, Wiesbaden 1982 and the response to this work by M. Boyce in *BSOAS* 47 (1984), 158-161.

[107] Vohu Manah (cf. the commentary on Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.15) has been attested in Asia Minor, Ārmaiti was known in Armenia (Russell, *ZorArm*, chapter 10), as were Haurvatāt and Ameretāt (*ibid.*, chapter 12). Aša/Arta is of course well attested in the OP inscriptions and personal names but since this is also an

The list of divinities Plutarch gives is generally interpreted on the basis of the Iranian names and functions of the Amesha Spentas. This is indeed the most reasonable procedure. Some commentators, however, have preferred to relate the Greek functions with corresponding Iranian divinities whether they belong to the Heptad or not. The passage has been frequently discussed and various lists of correspondences have been given. With regard to most divinities, there is common consent, but the interpretation of some is much debated.[108]

The first divinity Plutarch mentions is the god of benevolence, εὔνοια, that is Vohu Manah, "Good Thought." Lentz is the only one to identify this god with Ārmaiti, because "benevolence" is an ethical-social notion, and "good thought" an intellectual notion. Ārmaiti, "Devotion," would fit the ethical-social character of ἔυνοια better.[109] This, however, cannot be right; throughout all Zoroastrian texts Vohu Manah has been interpreted as the embodiment of the proper disposition towards the religion ("Good Intention")[110] for which "benevolence" is an excellent translation. The Greek word and its Avestan counterpart, moreover, are virtually synonymous.

Indo-Iranian concept, it is questionable whether he was there conceived as a member of the Heptad. Aphrodite Spandarmad, who is unfortunately still mentioned by M. Oppermann, 'Thrakische und danubische Reitergötter', in M.J. Vermaseren (ed.), *Die Orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich* (EPRO 93), Leiden 1981, 510-533, p. 522, is not a real *interpretatio graeca* of the Iranian Amesha Spenta, but an invention by L.A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (EPRO 11), Leiden 1968.

[108] Apart from the common interpretation of the six gods as the six Amesha Spentas, two alternative interpretations have been suggested, by Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 84-87, and by W. Lentz, 'Plutarch und der Zerwanismus', 116-118.

[109] Lentz, 'Plutarch und der Zerwanismus', 116.

[110] Vohu Manah is for instance mentioned in every verse of Y. 28, revealing not only Zarathustra's use of the concept (clearly something more than an intellectual attitude), but also the variety of meanings the concept was intended to evoke among the hearers.

The second divinity is the god of truth, ἀλήθεια, that is Aša Vahišta ("Best Righteousness"), whose name expresses truth as well as all other positive aspects of being "righteous." The concept Av. *aṣ̌a-*, OP *arta*, is possibly represented in Greek as ἀλήθεια or δικαιοσύνη.[111]

The third divinity is the god of good government, good order, εὐνομία, that is Khšathra Vairya, "Desirable Dominion." It is interesting to observe that the three correspondences found so far are all based more on the meaning of the names of the divinities than on their functions or the elements they guard.

The fourth divinity is the god of wisdom, σοφία. Most scholars agree that this is Spentā Ārmaiti, "Beneficent Devotion," but it is here that the problems begin. Lentz had already interpreted εὔνοια as Ārmaiti and consequently interpreted σοφία as Vohu Manah, which is very unlikely.[112] Benveniste suggested *Cistī/Cistā*, to whom Yt. 16 is devoted and who is indeed a goddess of wisdom (cf. Y. 48.11; 51.21). She was, however, eventually assimilated to Daēnā, "the Religion," and some of her most important functions were taken over by Verethraghna before Plutarch or his source made up the list of six divinities; this makes it extremely unlikely that it is Cistā who is meant with Plutarch's σοφία.[113] That Plutarch's σοφία may very well be identified with Ārmaiti, is for instance clear from Y. 31.12 (Ārmaiti informs people who know, who do not know, who doubt etc.), Y. 43.6 (Ārmaiti pronounces the judgments of the Wise Lord),[114] although here again the connection with Plutarch's σοφία is in the first place a connection in the meaning of the names.

The fifth divinity is the god of wealth, πλοῦτος, who must be identified with either Haurvatāt or Ameretāt, if one upholds the idea that Plutarch is referring to the Amesha Spentas. This, however, is difficult; Haurvatāt ("wholeness") or Ameretāt ("Immortality") are quite something different from wealth or riches. The identification of πλοῦτος with Haurvatāt is nevertheless upheld by a great variety of scholars.[115] Lentz suggested Khvarenah ("Glory"), which raises more problems than it solves, Benveniste Aši ("Reward"), who is indeed a goddess bestowing wealth, but who was not very prominent in Western Iran. C.P. Tiele surprisingly suggested Khšathra, which is also hardly likely.[116]

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[111] Nicolaus of Damascus, *FGrHist* 90 F67; cf. ch. 4.1.2.

[112] Lentz, 'Plutarch und der Zerwanismus', 117.

[113] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 85. For Cistā and her relations with Daēnā and Verethraghna, cf. Kreyenbroek, 'On the Shaping of Zoroastrian Theology', 139-141.

[114] The standard translation of her name in the PhlY., moreover, is *bowandagmenišnīh*, "right-mindedness", as is also observed in PhlY. 31.12 and 43.6.

[115] Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien*, 282-283; A.V.W. Jackson in *GrIrPhil*

The sixth divinity, "the artificer of the pleasures in recompense for virtue,"[117] should then be Ameretāt. Lentz suggested the concept *x^{v}āθra-*, "pleasure;" this is not, however, a divinity. Benveniste suggested *Rāman*, "peace".

The main obstacle to an identification of Plutarch's final two divinities, is that the expected divinities, Haurvatāt and Ameretāt, are not accorded a distinct personality in the Avesta or in the later tradition. They usually act as a couple, and are more often used in their capacity of guardians of water and plants, than as representing the notions they are meant to embody. The expected correspondence can therefore only be very vague, and "Wholeness" or "Health" can be connected with "abundance" and "Immortality" with "joy of life" as well as the other suggested Avestan connections.

That the Evil Spirit created an equal number of demons in opposition to the six gods created by Ahura Mazdā, is standard doctrine. Their names, in their capacity of special adversary of the individual Amesha Spentas, are only given in later sources, such as the list as found in *GBd*. 5.1: "such as Ahreman against Ohrmazd; Akōman against Wahman; Indar against Urdwahišt, Sāwul against Šahrewar, Nāygāh, whom they call Tarōmad, against Spandarmad; Tōrīz against Hordād and Zārīz against Amurdād".[118]

II, 637-639; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 162-164; Moulton, *EZ*, 110-115; 401, n. 1; Nyberg, *Religionen*, 392-393; Hopfner, *Plutarch über Isis und Osiris* II, 207-208. More hesitatingly: J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, 476; Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 75, n. 12; *HZ* III, 458-459.

[116] Lentz, 'Plutarch und der Zerwanismus', 117; Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 85-86; C.P. Tiele, *Geschiedenis van den godsdienst in de Oudheid tot op Alexander den Groote II*, Amsterdam 1902, 190, n. 2. Having identified Ploutos with Khšathra, Tiele had to find another divinity for εὐνομία; he suggested Daēnā.

[117] Humbach, *Gāthās* I, 13, n. 17.

[118] *ciyōn Ahreman ō Ōhrmazd, Akōman ō Wahman, Indar ō Urdwahišt, Sāwul ō Šahrewar, *Nāygāh ōy kē Tarōmad xwānēnd ō Spandarmad, *Tōrīz ō Hordād ud *Zārīz ō Amurdād*. Text and translation in Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, 115. The Avestan correspondences to the demons mentioned are *Aka- Manah-*, "Evil thought", *Indra-*, *Sauruua-*, *Nåŋhaiθiia-*, *Tauruui-* and *Zairik-*. With the exception of Aka Manah, they are listed in Vd. 10.9-10 and 19.43, without, however, the correspondence to the Ameša Spentas being indicated.

Then Horomazes, having magnified himself to three times his size, removed himself as far from the sun as the sun is distant from the earth, and adorned the heaven with stars;

As has often been noted, the idea that Ahura Mazdā increased his size three times, is unknown from Zoroastrian texts. In Iranian cosmology the sphere of the stars is closest to the earth, then the moon and then the sun, a view of the cosmos also found in Anaximander.[119] Beyond these spheres lay the "endless lights" (Av. *anaγra- raōcah-*), which was the dwelling place of Ahura Mazdā. That Ahura Mazdā adorns the heaven with stars is substantially in accordance with Zoroastrian teaching. The idea can already be found in the Gāthās (Y. 44.3) and throughout the Avesta, where the star Vanant is said to be "Mazdā-created",[120] and the stars in sum belong to the Bounteous Spirit (Spenta Mainyu; Y. 1.11; Yt. 12.32).

If the myth of Oromazes' tripling is unknown from Zoroastrian sources, the general accuracy of Plutarch's information suggests at least that there were Iranians who held that Ahura Mazdā increased in size three times at the beginning of creation. Although the myth itself is not attested, there are substantial traces of the existence of similar myths.

Earlier commentators have suggested two solutions to this problem. The earliest, sound, connection that was made concerned a myth of Yima, the first king.[121] During his reign the earth had become too small to carry men and cattle (*Vd.* 2.8-19). To remedy this, Ahura Mazdā ordered him to increase the size of the earth three times. Benveniste suggested a connection with the threefold heaven: the sphere of the stars, the sphere of the moon and the sphere of the sun.[122] Subsequently, however, he made a different proposal. Invoking Manichaean parallels, he attempted to show that originally, it was not Ahura Mazdā who tripled the cosmos, but Zurvan. The main reason for this was the fact that there was a close connection between the three heavenly realms and Ahura Mazdā's tripling, suggesting that the sky was considered to be the body of Ahura Mazdā. The passage therefore reflected a Zurvanite cosmogony.[123] This adds some important points to the discussion, but it hinges on the suggestion that the god Zurvān was thought of as the starry sky, which cannot be confirmed from Zoroastrian literature.

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[119] For these ideas, cf. *HZ* II, 154-157; W. Burkert, 'Iranisches bei Anaximandros', *RhM* 106 (1963), 97-134. A very full discussion can be found in A. Panaino, 'Uranographia Iranica I: The Three Heavens in the Zoroastrian Tradition and the Mesopotamian Background', in: Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 205-225.

[120] For the word *mazdaδāta-*, "Mazda-created", cf. A. Panaino, 'Philologia Avestica I. *ahuraδāta / mazdaδāta*', *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992), 199-209. For all starlore in the Avesta, *id. Tištrya II.*

[121] Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien*, 283, Moulton, *EZ*, 402, n. 1.

[122] This triple heaven was later represented in terms of the realm of Good Thought, the realm of Good Speech and the realm of the Good Acts (*HN* 2.15).

Chapter 47 of *De Iside* is not a structured chronological story. In the opening phrase, Plutarch announces that he is going to give some more myths he knows about from the Persians. It is unlikely, therefore, that the chapter in its entirety should be read as the narration of Zoroastrian views on the cosmic drama deriving from a single source. This appears to be at least tacitly assumed by some commentators, who find themselves inevitably at a loss with regard to the chronology of the myths: Ahura Mazdā triples in size between the creation of the Amesha Spentas and the creation of the stars and other gods.

To begin with an obvious observation, if Oromazes and by implication the cosmos (as suggested by Benveniste) increase in size three times, this suggests that in this variant of the cosmogony the cosmos was originally three times smaller than its present size. It is unlikely that the act of expanding the cosmos would be seen as deplorable. This recalls a well-established element from an earlier, pre-Zoroastrian cosmogony, in which the cosmos was originally conceived as a confined narrow space, which was enlarged at the second stage of creation.[124] The most important remnants of this earlier cosmogony can be found in the beliefs of two modern Kurdish sects, the Yezīdīs and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, but the Vedas, the Avesta and the reports on the Iranian religions in Greek, Armenian and Syriac are also important for its reconstruction.

The key element in the comparison of the Zoroastrian cosmogony with its hypothetical pre-Zoroastrian variant, is the evaluation of the second stage of creation. Whereas in Zoroastrianism this second stage is attributed to the evil spirit, and therefore has a negative value, the combined evidence of the Vedas and some

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[123] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 95-98.

[124] Cf. Kreyenbroek, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology'; *id.*, 'Mithra and Ahreman, Binyāmīn and Malak Ṭāwūs' and the references given there.

Avestan passages (especially the first part of Yt. 13), suggests that at an earlier stage, the second act of creation was regarded as a positive act of deliverance, performed by a divinity who for a whole range of reasons should be identified with Mithra.

In the RV, we often find allusions to a tripling of the earth or of the cosmos. The most elaborate representation of this cosmic act is the episode of the three steps taken by Viṣṇu.[125] This episode is of particular importance, because it concerns three steps from the earth to the blessed abode above the heavens, which is the favourite dwelling-place of Viṣṇu (cf. e.g. RV 1.154.1; 7.99.3). Indra, Viṣṇu and other gods are often connected with words denoting space or room (*varas*; *uru-*) and as gods who deliver from narrowness (*aṃhas*, cf. Av. *ązah-* in Yt. 10.22-23). Several gods, including Indra and Viṣṇu (RV 6.69.5) are praised for having made spacious the heavens and the earth. This is often represented as a tripling in size of original dimensions.[126] This is one of the celebrated acts of Varuna, who is praised in RV 4.42.4 for having tripled the size of the earth.

The triple extension of the earth by Yima (Vd. 2.8-19; cf. above) obviously presents a related idea. Here again, we encounter a cosmogonical myth that considered the original creation to be less good than the final result. What makes this particularly important, is the fact that the earth is tripled, just as Plutarch says that Oromazes triples in size, and the RV relates the tripling of heavens and earth.

Another indication of the tripling in Iranian cosmogonies comes from an unexpected source, that is also very difficult to interpret. In his seventh Epistle, pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite defends himself against an attack from the sophist Apollophanes, who claims that Pseudo-Dionysius constantly uses Greek achievements to criticise Greek achievements. Pseudo-Dionysius defends himself by presenting combinations of Biblical and extra-Biblical events, to prove that Apollophanes refuses to recognise the exalted position of God, by not acknowledging that the creator of the cosmos is also responsible for temporary suspensions of the normal order of things. His main argument is concerned with celestial events. He writes: "I will then say nothing about the great marvels in Egypt or about the divine signs that appeared in other circumstances, but (I mention) only the well-known celestial miracles that have been celebrated all over the world and by all nations. It is true that Apollophanes will certainly say that these things are not real. But above all, this is recorded in the sacred utterances of the Persians, and to the present day the Magi celebrate the memory of the triple Mithra. But let him be allowed to disbelieve these things through ignorance or lack of experience."[127] This passage is sometimes thought to refer to Mithras and the two Dadophori of the Mithraic Mysteries,[128] but if this were so, this would be the only reference to the Mithraic mysteries that makes connection with Zoroastrian priests and sacred literature. It is much more likely that Pseudo-Dionysius refers to an Iranian idea, which fits in with the other indications we have of the cosmogonical expansion. Here, then, we have a second instance of the *tripling* of a cosmic divinity.

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[125] For all references, cf. J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, Utrecht 1954, 55-72; F.B.J. Kuiper, 'The three Strides of Viṣṇu', *Ancient Indian Cosmogony*, 41-55. For an Iranian parallel, the three steps taken by the Amesha Spentas after the meeting with Zarathustra, cf. Dk. 9.43.7 (and Darmesteter, *ZA* 1, 401).

[126] For more references, cf. Kreyenbroek, 'Mithra and Ahreman in Iranian Cosmogonies'.

The word Pseudo-Dionysius uses for Mithras, τριπλάσιος, "thrice as great, triple," is also used in Plethon's commentary on the *Oracula Chaldaica*, in which he elaborates upon Plutarch's passage by combining Plutarch's triple division of the powers (Oromazes—Mithras—Areimanios) with Oromazes' triple extension: "But Oromazes withdrew from the sun [...] three times (τριπλάσιον), but Mithras—to be sure—who is the second after Oromazes, twice."[129] This passage evidently does not reflect an Iranian tradition, but merely a combination of the evidence found in Plutarch. It clearly shows that Plethon interpreted Oromazes' triple extension as a reference to the division of the three realms between three divinities. This, however, is not Plutarch's division.

Pseudo-Dionysius places the reference to the triple Mithras in the context of celestial events. It remains a distinct possibility, therefore, that his triplicity was celebrated in the tradition Pseudo-Dionysius refers to as the primordial event for which Mithra was celebrated: the tearing asunder of heaven and earth, possibly conceived of as a tripling in size of the original dimensions, as it is in the RV (with different protagonists).

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[127] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistula* 7.2 (G. Heil & A.M. Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum II* (PTS 36), Berlin/New York 1991, 168).

[128] E.g. Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*, 123. Cf. also R.C. Zaehner, 'Postscript to Zurvan', *BSOAS* 17 (1955), 232-249, pp. 243-249, and the criticisms on this article by Gershevitch, *AHM*, 69-72. For the passage in Pseudo-Dionysius, cf. also ch. 4.1.4.

[129] Text in Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 253-254. For Plethon's commentary on the *Oracula Chaldaica*, cf. C.M. Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon. The Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford 1986, 48-61 and *passim*.

These are all traces of a mythology which allude to a tripling or increase in size of an originally smaller cosmos. Benveniste's remarks on the fact that the passage refers to the sky as the body of Ahura Mazdā (because Ahura Mazdā increases his own size) recall those passages which describe the fact that Ahura Mazdā wears the firmament as a garment.[130] For the latter image, but in connection with Mithras, there is also iconographical evidence, showing Mithras in the act of killing the bull, wearing a mantle in the shape of a globe covered with stars (of which six or seven are particularly prominent).[131] If we take seriously what Plutarch has to say, as I think we must, there were Iranians who believed that Ahura Mazdā increased in size three times in a movement from the sun to the outer limits of creation. It is impossible to determine even approximately in which circles these cosmogonical views were held. We find traces of similar myths in various traditions, but often with different protagonists (Yima, Mithra). Ahura Mazdā's tripling may therefore reflect a zoroastrianised version of earlier cosmogonical speculations.

and one star, Sirius, he established above all others as guardian and watcher.

Plutarch's information on the special position of the star Sirius is precise and therefore extremely welcome. It is, moreover, singularly clear who is meant with this brief mention of Sirius and where the information comes from. Sirius can be no other than Tištrya.[132] This divinity is honoured with an ancient Yašt, Yt. 8, and it is from Yt. 8.44 that Plutarch quotes, which is one of the very few quotes from the Avesta in Greek literature. Tištrya is there called "the bright glorious star Tištrya, whom Ahura Mazdā established (as) lord and overseer of all stars as (he established) Zarathustra of men".[133] It seems beyond doubt that Plutarch's φύλακα καὶ πϱοόπτην is a rendering of the Avestan *ratūm paitidaēmca*. This is of interest for possible traces of the transmission of Avestan passages beyond the circles of priestly learning, but the uncertainty on the origin of the passage in Plutarch's collection of mythical details considerably limits the actual use that can be made of this quote.

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[130] Yt. 13.2-3; but cf. Y. 30.5, where similar claims are made for Spenta Mainyu. Cf. Kreyenbroek, 'On Spenta Mainyu's Role in the Zoroastrian Cosmogony.'

[131] M.J. Vermaseren, *Mithriaca III. The Mithraeum at Marino* (EPRO 16/3), Leiden 1982, *passim*; cf. the similar paintings in *CIMRM* 389-390 (Mitreo Barberini). A more dubious case, but at least showing a similar shape of Mithras' mantle is *CIMRM* 1283, from Neuenheim.

[132] On Tištrya, cf. Panaino, *Tištrya I-II*, *passim*.

Tištrya is an Avestan divinity, who was equated with the Western Iranian *Tīri*. Tīri shares many characteristics with Babylonian Nabu. The two divinities, Tištrya and Tīri, virtually amalgamated into one personality; the name Tīri is in fact better attested than that of Tištrya, even in Eastern Iran, where his cult was probably introduced by the Achaemenians.[134] Tīri seems to have been the divinity of the planet Mercury (as was Nabū), whereas Tištrya was the divinity of the star Sirius. Plutarch's mention of the star Sirius as guardian and overseer of all is unequivocally Avestan. That the hymn to Tištrya has an Egyptian background, as R. Merkelbach argued, seems very unlikely,[135] but the shared importance the Egyptians and the Iranians accorded to the star Sirius, may have intensified Plutarch's interest in the presence of the star Sirius in the Avestan pantheon.

Twenty-four other gods were created by him and put into an egg. Those who were created from Areimanius were of equal number, and they pierced through the egg ... and so it comes about that good and evil are mixed.

The twenty-four other gods mentioned by Plutarch have been the subject of many speculations, because the number does not reflect standard Zoroastrian doctrine. The number of divinities is nowhere in Avestan or Pahlavi literature limited to 24, and a simple enumeration of divine beings produces a much higher number. To solve this apparent paradox, the Chaldaean doctrine of the twenty-four stars, as related in Diodorus Siculus 2.31, was invoked. The number 24 was considered so precise that it required a specific justification.[136] Others have suggested that the number 24 reflects the number of deities of the calendar, if one subtracts Ahura Mazdā and the Amesha Spentas.[137] Benveniste, in his customary wish to discover Zurvanism in Plutarch's text, declared the number 24 to be "peculiar to Zervanism," referring to the twelve signs of the zodiac and doubled for, it seems, unknown reasons.[138]

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[133] *yim ratūm paiti.daēmca vīspaēšąm stārąm fradaθat̰ ahurō mazdå yaθa narąm zaraθuštrəm.*

[134] *HZ* I, 75-77; *HZ* II, 31-33; Panaino, *Tištrya* II, 67-70.

[135] R. Merkelbach, *Isisfeste in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 5), Meisenheim am Glan 1963, 70-76 ('Tištrya-Sirius und die Nilflut im Avesta'). Merkelbach's hypothesis, though well argued, fails to convince for several reasons. First of all, the links between the Achaemenian soldiers and their priests in Egypt with the nameless composers and compilers of the Avestan hymns is highly dubious. Tištrya, moreover, is a specifically Avestan god, which would require an Eastern Iranian presence in Egypt (Tīri is not associated with Sirius). The fact that Tištrya fights Apaoša in the shape of a horse does not establish the late date of composition of Yt. 8, for it is highly questionable that—as Merkelbach argues—the Iranian divinities were imagined in the shape of a bull.

A tradition mentioning 24 gods is not confined to this passage in Plutarch, but can also be found in Syriac literature; Mār Barhad-Bešabba wrote that Zarathustra only recognised twenty-four gods, and that (together with the Zurvanite tetrad and Ohrmazd and Ahreman!) these are the thirty calendar gods. An anonymous treatise *On the error of the Magi* also mentions thirty gods in connection with the calendar.[139] These texts confirm the importance of the twenty-four and six gods who at one point apparently were felt to represent the thirty calendar gods. This conception is obviously not a learned tradition, but a popular interpretation, possibly influenced by the laborious and confusing creation of the Zoroastrian calendar.[140] It is remarkable, that Plutarch confirms a distinction between the Amesha Spentas and the *yazatas* by referring to the twenty-four divinities as "the other gods."

The mention of the egg, in which the twenty-four gods are placed, is also slightly confusing, for it can not be found in the Avesta. Most often, a passage from the *Dādestān ī mēnōg ī xrad* is quoted (MX 44.8-10): "Heaven, earth, water and all other (things) that are in them, are in the shape of an egg, just like a hen's egg. And the heaven above the earth was created like an egg by the creator Ohrmazd himself and the earth, which is suspended in the middle of the heaven, precisely resembles the yolk in the middle of an egg."[141] In the cosmogonical and cosmological sections of the *Bundahišn* and other Pahlavi books, the same imagery of the egg is used; Plutarch indeed transmits a Zoroastrian idea.[142] The concept of lesser divinities being placed in a confined, small place (in this case a pearl) is well known from the cosmogonies of the Yezidis and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq.[143]

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[136] Moulton, *EZ*, 402, n. 4; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 166-167; Hani, 'Plutarque', 499-500.

[137] Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien*, 284; A.V.W. Jackson, *GrIrPhil* II, 640-641; Boyce, *HZ* II, 248; Boyce & Grenet, *HZ* III, 459.

[138] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 104.

[139] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 100-103.

[140] On which, cf. *HZ* II, 243-250.

That Ahura Mazdā placed the twenty-four gods in the egg, however, is wholly absent from all Iranian sources. At the most interesting moment, moreover, Plutarch's text has a lacuna. Oromazes, having created the twenty-four gods, places them in the egg; Areimanios creates an equal number of rival demons, who pierce the egg. Then follows the lacuna; the conclusion of the section is that this explains the mixture of good and evil. That the evil demons equal the beneficent divinities in number is standard doctrine, as is the idea that the evil spirit pierces the sky. This idea can be found in many cosmogonical passages in Pahlavi literature, interestingly enough frequently only mentioning *one* hole produced by the Evil Spirit.[144]

The explanation of the mixture of good and evil beginning with the piercing of the egg is wholly compatible with the Zoroastrian cosmogony, but several details are unknown from Zoroastrian sources. The lacuna in the text precludes a more detailed examination of the possible background of Plutarch's version of the myth.

There will come the destined time when Areimanius, the bringer of plague and famine, must needs be utterly destroyed and obliterated by these. The earth shall be flat and level and one way of life and one government shall

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[141] *Asmān ud zamīg ud āb ud abārīg har cē andarōn xāyagdēs ēdōn homānāg ciyōn murwān xāyag-ē. ud asmān ī azabar ī zamīg xāyag homānāg pad dastkārīh ī dādār Ohrmazd winnārd ēstēd. ud zamīg ī andar mayān ī asmān hangōšīdag ēdōn homānāg ciyōn zardag [*andar] mayān ī xāyag.*

[142] The texts have been conveniently collected and discussed by Bailey, *ZorProb*, 135-136. Cf. also Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 318-319, for a reconstruction of the first chapter of the *Greater Bundahišn* in which the sky is also compared with an egg. A different imagery appears to have been current in Yt. 13.2-3, where the sky is compared with a bird sitting on its egg, the earth: W.B. Henning, 'Ein unbeachtetes Wort im Awesta', in *Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Weller*, Leipzig 1954, 289-292 (= *Selected Papers* II, 437-440).

[143] For which, cf. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 54-57.

[144] *WZ* 2.1; 2.18; *PhlRDd*. 48.95.

arise of all men, who shall be happy and speak the same language.

With the announcement of the eventual defeat of Areimanios, the eschatological section of Plutarch's collection of Persian myths begins. This compendium of Iranian eschatologies is in two parts. After the present passage, Theopompus' account of the Zoroastrian conception of history is given, which—as we shall see—is sometimes radically different. This passage of *De Iside* has generally been treated as one of the essential texts for the reconstruction of Zurvanism, but given the different views expressed on Zurvanism in recent years,[145] caution in attributing variant views directly to Zurvanite speculations is necessary.

The speculations on the Zurvanite nature of Plutarch's version of the Persian religion were triggered by the appearance of the words χϱόνος εἱμαϱμένος, "fixed, measured, destined time." In Middle Persian this corresponds to *zamān ī brīn*, one of the declared key terms of Zurvanism, equivalent to *zamān ī dagrand-xwadāy* or *zamān ī kanāragōmand*, "time of the long dominion" or "bounded time." This, it is well known, is a category of time that is opposed to *zamān ī akanārag*, "boundless time", corresponding to Avestan *zruuan- akarana-* as opposed to *zruuan- darəγō.xᵛaδāta*. These Avestan and Middle Persian time speculations, roughly speaking the opposition between eternal unbounded time (which existed before the creation) and the limited period of time created specifically to make the battle between Ohrmazd and Ahreman possible, and therefore finite by nature, were of great importance in the discussion on the Iranian, Egyptian, or Greek background of the Hellenistic time-speculations, exemplified by the concept of (the divinity) Aion.[146] Since much is at stake here, a thorough evaluation of the information Plutarch offers is necessary.

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[145] Cf. ch. 2.5.

[146] Given the wealth of literature on the subject, I can only mention the publications on this subject that are of direct relevance to Iran; the subject was very important for the members of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: W. Bousset, 'Der Gott Aion', in *idem*, *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (ed. by A.F. Verheule, Suppl.Nov.Test. 50), Leiden 1979, 192-230; C. Colpe, 'Aion', *Wörterbuch der Mythologie* IV.12, 246-250; A.J. Festugière, *Rev.Herm.Trism.* IV, 146-149; F. Junker, 'Über iranische Quellen der hellenistischen Aion-Vorstellung', *Vortr.Bibl.Warburg* 1921-1922 (1923), 125-178; A.D. Nock, 'A Vision of Mandulis Aion', *HThR* 27 (1934), 53-104, repr. in *Essays* 357-400; R. Pettazzoni, 'Aion-(Kronos)Chronos in Egypt', in *idem*, *Essays on the History of Religions* (SHR 1), Leiden 1954, 171-179; R. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, Bonn 1921, 151-250; H. Sasse, 'Aion', *RAC* 1 (1950), 193-204. For an overview of the discussion in connection with Commagene, cf. Waldmann, *Mazdaismus*, 184-191 (but cf. *HZ* III, 332-333 with n. 119). For Aion-Saeculum etc. in relation to Mithraism, R. Pettazzoni,

The idea that any reference to limited or boundless time in Zoroastrian literature must be ascribed to Zurvanite speculations appears to be wrong.[147] It not only impedes a proper understanding of the concept of time in Zoroastrianism, but there is also evidence in the Avesta (where traces of Zurvanism cannot be expected) for the double concepts of boundless and limited time. Zurvanism is difficult to imagine without the proto-cosmogonic myth of Zurvan as the father of the good and the evil spirit, and the resulting conception of the two spirits as brothers; there is not a trace of this conception in Plutarch. Therefore, the odds are against ascribing Plutarch's version of Persian mythology *in toto* to Zurvanism.

There is a distinct problem with Plutarch's introduction of the term χϱόνος εἱμαϱμένος: if it indeed renders Middle Persian *zamān ī brīn* or a related, this is wrong. The "limited time" created in anticipation of the ensuing battle between Ohrmazd and Ahreman is a technical term for the *entire duration* of this battle.[148] As Griffiths already noticed, the wording χϱόνος εἱμαϱμένος may be due to the occurrence of this expression in Plato (who, however, uses it freely to indicate "the proper, established moment" without any eschatological meaning).[149] The Iranian terms for the fixed moment when the evil spirit will be defeated are *frašgird* (from Av. *frašo.kərəti-*, "the making beautiful") and *tan ī pasēn*, "the final body," which not only refers to the resurrection of the bodies, but also to the moment of the resurrection (*ristāxēz*), the end of time.[150]

'The Monstrous Figure of Time in Mithraism', in *Essays on the History of Religions*, 180-192; M.J. Vermaseren, 'A Magical Time God', in: Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies*, 446-456.

[147] Cf. esp. Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', *passim*; cf. also S. Pines, 'Eschatology and the Conception of Time in the Slavonic Book of Enoch', in R.J.Z. Werblowski & C.J. Bleeker (eds.), *Types of Redemption* (SHR-*NUMEN* Suppl. 18), Leiden 1970, 72-87.

[148] *GBd*. 1.20-22; 1.24-25; 26.3; *WZ* 1.9-12; *PhlRDd*. 23.14.

[149] Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside*, 478-479; Plato, *Protagoras* 320D; cf. also *Protagoras* 321C, *Phaedo* 113A, *Timaeus* 41E.

[150] A curious echo of both ideas—the fixed moment and the Renovation—can be found in the Manual of Discipline from Qumran (1QS 4.25), where it is said that God has appointed the two spirits side by side "until the fixed moment and the making new" (*ʿd qṣ nḥrṣh wʿśwt ḥdšh*). This passage has long ago been connected with Plutarch and with Iranian sources (H. Michaud, 'Un mythe zervanite dans un des manuscrits de Qumrân', *VT* 5 (1955), 137-147), because Jewish correspondences are difficult to find.

That Areimanios is described as bringing "plague and famine" (λοιμὸς καὶ λίμος) is a Greek usage,[151] but represents well-attested ideas from Iran. Ahreman in general is responsible for all sickness; the golden age of Yima is described as a time when sickness and death did not exist (Y. 9.5). That Ahreman is said to be destroyed by famine and plague is unknown from Iran, but—as Boyce and Grenet have pointed out—his companion Āz is said to be destroyed by hunger.[152] That the evil spirit will be utterly destroyed at the end of time is a genuine Iranian tradition.[153]

At the end of time, the earth will become flat and mountains will disappear. Mountains are prominent in Iran's sacred geography (evident from the mountain lists in *GBd*. 9 and from Yt. 19.1-8), and are said to have come into being in response to the attack of the evil spirit on the perfect creation (*WZ* 3.27-30). They are, moreover, said to disappear in *GBd*. 34.33. That the earth becomes level at the renovation is thus attested for Zoroastrianism; the idea has remarkable parallels in apocalyptic visions of other peoples, especially in the closely related Jewish apocalyptic texts.[154]

The view of human existence after the flattening of the earth, after the final destruction of Ahreman and his helpers, is symbolised as "one life and one society of all blessed men, speaking the same language" (ἕνα βίον καὶ μίαν πολιτείαν ἀνθρώπων μακαρίων καὶ ὁμογλώσσων ἁπάντων). Iranian parallels for this combination are not easy to find.[155] Most frequently, the passage in *GBd*. 34.21 is adduced: "Together, mankind will be of one voice and will loudly praise Ohrmazd and the Amahraspands."[156] Similar expectations are described in *WZ* 35, where the perfect new state of the world after the renovation is expressed in terms of the absence of adversity (*apetyāragīh*; *WZ* 35.54). This is probably as close as one can come to "one life, one society of all blessed men".[157]

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[151] Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 77. The combination λοιμὸς καὶ λίμος is an ancient one: Hesiodus, *Opera et dies* 243; Herodotus 7.171; Thucydides 2.54. Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.47, is also rightly adduced by Bidez and Cumont as a comparable idea attributed to the Magi. This and the similar passage in Lactantius, *Epitome* 66.3, are, however, dependent on Greek rather than on Iranian texts.

[152] *HZ* III, 460; *WZ* 34.35.

[153] For texts mentioning the destruction of Ahreman, cf. *HZ* III, 394-395, n. 150.

[154] For an overview, cf. B. Lincoln, '"The Earth becomes Flat": A Study of Apocalyptic Imagery', *Comp.Stud.Soc.Hist*. 25 (1983), 136-153.

[155] Cf. M.V. Cerutti, '*Heis bios kai mia politeia* (Plut., *de Is*. 47). Contributo per l'analisi storico-religiosa di un tema universalistico', in: G. Sfameni Gasparro (ed.), *'Αγαθὴ ἐλπίς. Studi storico-religiosi in onore di Ugo Bianchi* (Storia delle Religioni 11), Roma 1994, 243-268.

[156] *mardōm āgenēn ham-wāng bawēnd ud buland stāyišnīh ō Ohrmazd ud Amahraspandān barēnd*.

Theopompus says that, according to the Magians, for three thousand years alternately the one god will dominate the other and be dominated, and that for another three thousand years they will fight and make war, until one smashes up the domain of the other.

The source for Plutarch's information on this particular subject, a variant account of the speculative history of the Persians, is Theopompus of Chios, well known throughout antiquity for his multi-volume *Philippica*.[158] Theopompus' works were widely read and abridged. He is quoted as an authority on Persian matters by Athenaeus, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius and Aeneas of Gaza. The latter three authors explicitly quote him as an authority on Persian eschatology.

This account of the speculative history has been thought to reflect a Zurvanite idea concerning the history of the world, as opposed to the Zoroastrian division of history in creation-mixture-separation.[159] It has even been suggested that the length of the cosmic period (9,000 years as in Plutarch or 12,000 years as in the *GBd*.) can solve the attribution of either period to Zoroastrianism or Zurvanism.[160] Of greater interest is the attribution of a separate period of time as the dominion of Ahreman. This idea, it has been argued, cannot be Zoroastrian and must therefore be Zurvanite. The underlying thought is that Zurvanites, in representing Ohrmazd and Ahreman as brothers, would have been willing to recognise Ahreman as a "god", and to attribute a period of the cycle of years to him.[161] There are indeed traces of a myth in which Zurvan promises to give dominion to his firstborn. Upon this promise, Ahreman rushes out of his father's womb and demands the promised dominion. Zurvan, true to his word, cannot but grant Ahreman's wish, but only for a limited time, after which Ohrmazd will rule, and only as a lower king than blessed Ohrmazd.[162] The duration of Ahreman's dominion is there said to last either 1,000 years (Ełišē), or—more generally—the full period of 9,000 years. This has important theological consequences: it shows that in certain circles the present world was seen as being under the dominion of Ahreman. A genuine correspondence with Theopompus' division of the cosmic history has so far not been found.

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[157] Cf. the long discussion of the passage in Cerutti, *Antropologia e apocalittica*, 45-62.

[158] For Theopompus, cf. M.A. Flower, *Theopompus of Chios. History and Rhetoric in the Fourth Century B.C.*, Oxford 1994.

[159] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 106-112.

[160] How impossible this is, emerges clearly from the fact that Benveniste argued that 9,000 years was a typically Zurvanite number (*Persian Religion*, 107-109), whereas Zaehner argued for the period of 12,000 years as specifically Zurvanite (*Zurvan*, 96-100, referring to the older treatments of Nyberg, Junker and others).

[161] *HZ* II, 235.

The Zoroastrian sacred history is divided in three periods of 3,000 years, called *bundahišn* (creation), *gumēzišn* (mixture) and *wizārišn* (separation).[163] The first period is wholly under the dominion of Ohrmazd. He recites the *Ahunawar* at the beginning of this period and thus brings Ahreman into a coma, which lasts for the entire duration of the creation. The second period, the mixture, is the period of battle, and the third period, the separation, will witness the final defeat of Ahreman. In this scheme, then, Ohrmazd is in control of the first and the third period, but not of the second. In the myth of Zurvan mentioned above, Ahreman is seen as lord of the world for the entire duration of the limited time. Ohrmazd, however, is said to reign above him; this is an imagery strikingly similar to certain Platonic and Gnostic systems where an evil being rules the sublunar world.[164] The system represented by Theopompus, then, appears to be yet another variant within this conglomerate of opinions on speculative history.[165] That is all this passage can yield, and nothing in it commands attribution to Zurvanism. That the two spirits destroy the possessions or creations of the opposing party, is standard doctrine.

In the end Hades shall perish and men shall be happy; neither shall they need sustenance nor shall they cast a shadow, while the god who will have

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[162] The main texts, passages by Eznik of Kołb, Ełiše Vardapet, Theodore bar Kōnay and Yoḥannān bar Penkayē, can be found in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419-429.

[163] For a summary of the Zoroastrian cosmogony, as evident from *GBd*. 1-7, *WZ* 1-3 etc., cf. Kreyenbroek, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology I', *passim* and 'Mithra and Ahreman, Binyāmīn and Malak Ṭāwūs', 58-61.

[164] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 69-72.

[165] Cf. Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 234a-h, for examples of variants in speculations to be found in the Arabic reports.

brought this about shall have quiet and shall rest, not for a long while indeed for a god, but for such time as would be reasonable for a man who falls asleep. Such is the mythology of the Magi.

That mankind will be happy or blessed at the end of time, is the most common representation of the situation after the Renovation. Plutarch does not mention the resurrection. Diogenes Laertius and Aeneas of Gaza both refer to the idea of a resurrection of the dead on the authority of Theopompus (cf. ch. 4.4.1). Nevertheless, what Plutarch describes is a very accurate representation of one of the ideas concerning the resurrection.[166] It belongs to the common stock of Zoroastrian eschatological ideas, that before the Renovation, mankind will stop eating. After the Renovation, food will no longer be necessary.[167]

That the bodies will no longer cast a shadow, however, is more problematic. For this information, several solutions have been suggested. Bidez and Cumont suggested that the shadow was created by the Evil Spirit and it would therefore disappear with his defeat.[168] That the Evil Spirit has created the shadow is not only unknown from any source, but also extremely unlikely in view of the unequivocal positive valuation of the phenomenon. Widengren and Cerutti have suggested that the absence of shadow was causally linked with the fact that food was no longer consumed. Food and darkness were somehow connected and the presence or absence of food could be reflected by the degree of luminosity of the body.[169] There is, however, nothing to suggest that this was actually part of Zoroastrian eschatological ideas. Bianchi suggested that the lack of shadow was caused by the permanent eschatological moment: the sun will stand still in the middle of the sky.[170]

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[166] This passage is extensively treated in De Jong, 'Shadow and Resurrection' [forthcoming].

[167] *GBd*. 34.1-3; *DD* 34.3: "And when the time of the Renovation is near, the material beings will stop eating and live without food" (*Ud nazd ō zamānag ī frašgird astōmandān az xwardārīh be ēstēnd ud pad a-xwarišnīh zīwēnd*). The idea is discussed by Cerutti, *Antropologia e apocalittica*, 66-78; cf. also *ead*., 'Tematiche "encratite" nello zoroastrismo pahlavico', in: U. Bianchi (ed.), *La tradizione dell'enkrateia*. *Motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche*, Roma 1985, 637-668. For a critique of several of Cerutti's views, cf. De Jong, 'Shadow and Resurrection.'

[168] Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 78, n. 25; Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 112; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 129. More recently Hani, 'Plutarque en face du dualisme iranien', 508; *HZ* II, 236.

[169] G. Widengren, 'Leitende Ideen und Quellen der iranischen Apokalyptik', in: D. Hellholm (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, Tübingen 1983, 77-162, p. 132; Cerutti, *Antropologia e apocalittica*, 42-43.

But even in such a situation, it would be strange to say that mankind will no longer cast a shadow.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest an alternative interpretation. Both in the Avesta and in the Pahlavi books, the absence of shadow signifies a spiritual (*mēnōg*) existence.[171] The horses drawing the chariots of Sraoša and Mithra, for instance, are said to cast no shadow and to belong to the spiritual realm.[172] Conversely, the shadow is not only material,[173] but also partly corporeal.[174] In most versions of Zoroastrian eschatology, the resurrection is represented as taking place in real bodies: bones, blood, veins, sinews, flesh and skin. All bodies will be recomposed and will undergo the ordeal.

There were alternative views, however. The Arabic author Maqdisī claims to have heard from one of the Magi of Fārs that "the whole of mankind will become spiritual, permanent, eternal, in constant luminosity and constant repose."[175] If absence of shadow, as the Zoroastrian sources suggest, means a spiritual state, it seems that Plutarch's reference to the absence of shadow at the end of time implies the conception of a resurrection in a spiritual body. That there were Zoroastrians who held this view is clear from *WZ* 34.1: "It has been shown thus in the Religion, that Zardušt asked Ohrmazd: 'The corporeal (*tanōmand*) beings who have died on earth, will they be corporeal again at the Renovation, or will they be in the likeness of those who cast no shadow (*asāyag homānāgīhā*)?' Ohrmazd said: 'They will be corporeal again and rise.'" The question is settled in the "orthodox" material interpretation, but the question itself and the explicit reference to a shadowless existence as a possibility for mankind after the Renovation, strongly suggest that this is the situation as presented in Plutarch's rendering of Theopompus.

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[170] Bianchi, *Zamān ī Ohrmazd*, 127, n. 22.

[171] For the notions *mēnōg* (spiritual) and its opposite *gētīg* (material), cf. S. Shaked, 'The Notions *mēnōg* and *gētīg* in the Pahlavi Texts and their Relation to Eschatology', *Acta Orientalia* 33 (1971), 59-107.

[172] Yt. 10.68; Y. 57.27.

[173] Cf. for instance Dk. 7.6.8, where the words *ma pad tis ī sāyagōmand* ("not for the sake of things casting a shadow") are glossed *kū ma nīrmad ī gētīg rāy* ("that means: not for the profit of material things").

[174] Cf. *PhlRDd*. 55.1, where the problem is treated whether it makes a man polluted if his shadow falls upon a corpse.

[175] Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 32.

The final sentence of Plutarch's collection of Zoroastrian myths, is a mystery. The idea that the god who has brought all this to pass (Ahura Mazdā) will sleep fits very badly with a god who is said to be sleepless (*ax^{v}afna-*; Vd. 19.20). It is clear that there is no longer a real task for the divinity, because the Renovation is permanent and the god has achieved all his goals.

4. Evaluation

The two chapters on Zoroastrianism from Plutarch's *De Iside* are the most important of all Greek passages on the religion of the Persians as far as Zoroastrian theology and mythology is concerned. Plutarch's sources are unknown, but are usually thought to be those writers from the early Academy who have elsewhere been credited with an interest in the religious ideas of the Magi. As a result of this, it is impossible to make statements on the Iranian sources underlying Plutarch's description of Zoroastrianism. The least one can say, however, is that the text reflects highly specialised priestly traditions. This is evident not only from the various cosmogonical and eschatological myths, but particularly from the detailed description of the Amesha Spentas, which is the only known description of the Heptad in non-Iranian literature. *De Iside* 46-47 is not just interesting for the reflection of Zoroastrian doctrine in Greek literature, or for the application of Zoroastrian ideas to the development of Platonist ideas, but it also reveals certain aspects of Zoroastrian doctrine that are undoubtedly genuine, but have been obscured in the Iranian sources themselves, possibly through a process of priestly redaction. There are three examples: the first is the tripling in size of Ahura Mazdā; the second the idea that a third of the cosmic period has been under the dominion of the Evil Spirit; and the third the belief that the resurrection will take place in a spiritual body. Other details in Plutarch's version of Zoroastrian doctrine are impossible to check; this is true not only for some of the interpretations of the individual Amesha Spentas, but also for a theogony according to which Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu are born from light and darkness respectively (evident also from Damascius) and for the idea that the differences in language will disappear after the Renovation.

4. *Diogenes Laertius 1.6-9*

1. *Introduction*

With the *Lives and Meanings of Eminent Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius we enter the realm of a very complex subject, the historiography of ancient philosophy. Before entering a discussion of the nature of Diogenes' work, it may be in order to explain that the only purpose in treating this passage of Diogenes is to find in it elements of knowledge of Iranian religious beliefs and practices in the (lost) works of a range of eminent philosophers, most of whom were connected with the Academy and the Peripatos. My approach thus rests firmly upon a steady comparison of the information Diogenes transmits on the Magi with what is known from the Iranian sources, and is not concerned with the difficult questions of Diogenean *Quellenforschung* or the importance of his work or of the *prooemium* for the history of philosophy.[1]

Diogenes Laertius, a "local savant largely depending on the not wholly up-to-date public library of an unimportant town in an outlying Roman province",[2] was a native from Nicaea in Bithynia to be dated most probably in the first quarter of the third century CE. He is known from one work only, *The Lives and Meanings of Eminent Philosophers*. The programmatic title—presumably spurious—places the work firmly in the genre of ancient biographies and doxographies of philosophers and philosophical schools.

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[1] For the many problems of the *Quellenforschung* and its limits for an understanding of the prooemium, cf. B.A. Desbordes, *Introduction à Diogène Laërce*, Diss. Utrecht 1990, *passim*. One important question, however, must be mentioned here. It is evident from some responses to Diogenes' *prooemium*, that contemporary historians of ancient philosophy sometimes have felt it difficult to deal with the many philosophers and historians Diogenes refers to as having shown an interest in the Magi. That this is a difficulty they share at least with Diogenes himself, may come as some solace, but Diogenes' text has sometimes been manipulated to get around the problem of Academic and Aristotelian fascination with Iran (W. Spoerri, 'Untersuchungen zur Vorrede des Diogenes Laertius', in W. Spoerri, *Späthellenistische Berichte über Welt, Kultur und Götter. Untersuchungen zu Diodor von Sizilien* (Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 9), Basel 1959, 53-69, is a good example). For the processes at work here, cf. P. Kingsley, 'Greeks, Shamans and Magi' and 'Meetings with Magi', both *passim*.

[2] J. Mansfeld, 'Diogenes Laertius on Stoic Philosophy', *Elenchos* 7 (1986), 297-382, p. 301. Mansfeld's entire introduction to the structure of Diogenes' work (pp. 299-317) is strongly recommended, as are the other articles in the volume, which is dedicated in its entirety to Diogenes Laertius.

As a writer in the third century CE, Diogenes must have been acquainted with the fashion among Jewish and Christian authors to stress the dependence of Greek philosophy on the philosophical and religious systems of Egyptians, Persians, Indians etc. Many Christian authors have stressed this dependence far beyond reasonable limits with the polemical goal of showing how the Greeks merely borrowed the traditions of which they were so proud from exactly those cultures for which they had such disdain.[3] Apart from these Christian attacks on the primacy of Greek philosophy, there certainly were Greek introductions in philosophy and philosophers which paid attention to the dependence of Greek philosophical developments on Oriental stimuli. There are, for instance, several stories on the travels important philosophers made to the Magi in Persia or the priests of Egypt, there are early and mythical philosophers of alleged Oriental stock (especially Anacharsis the Scythian) and there were important or less important philosophers who certainly were of Oriental descent (Numenius, Ammonius, Philo etc.). Diogenes, who lived in an area with a long Oriental history, staunchly upholds the primacy and the uniqueness of philosophy as a Greek affair. From this perspective he has written a prooemium to his *Lives and Meanings* to settle the question of possible barbarian origins for Greek philosophy in a negative manner.[4]

The fact that the Greeks invented philosophy and not the barbarians has long been recognised as an important trend throughout Diogenes' work.[5] It manifests itself not only in the prooemium (where it is very explicit), but also, for instance, in his discussion of Anacharsis, who was half Scythian, half Greek and is consistently represented as desirous of being as Greek as possible (1.101-105). The fact, however, that the problems of the Oriental background of Greek philosophy do not occur in the main body of the text suggests that Diogenes considered his treatment of the matter in 1.1-12 definitive.

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[3] A good example of this attitude is Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.71. More references can be found in A. Festugière, *Rev Herm.Trism.* I, 19-44, and F. Bömer, *Der lateinische Neuplatonismus und Neupythagoreismus und Claudianus Mamertus in Sprache und Philosophie* (Klassisch-philologische Studien 7), Leipzig 1926, 96-109.

[4] For the prooemium, cf. especially O. Gigon, 'Das Prooemium des Diogenes Laertios: Struktur und Probleme', in G. Luck (ed.), *Horizonte der Humanitas. Eine Freundesgabe für Professor Dr. Walter Willi zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*, Bern-Stuttgart 1960, 37-64.

[5] See for this theme, R. Hope, *The Book of Diogenes Laertius. Its Spirit and its Method*, New York 1930; J. Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius and his Hellenistic Background* (Hermes Einzelschrift 40), Wiesbaden 1978.

In 1.1-12 Diogenes writes is that in spite of the claims of some, philosophy did not originate among the barbarians. In fact, he says, the word "philosophy" resists translation into any of the barbarian languages (1.4). In order to illustrate the impossibilities of an original barbarian invention of philosophy, he treats some characteristics of Persians and Egyptians in greater detail. He had, so to speak, an axe to grind and it is within this context that his many remarks on barbarian philosophies must be read.

Thus, the Thracian Orpheus cannot be considered a philosopher, because he attributes human emotions to the gods (1.5), the Indian Gymnosophists and the Celtic Druids philosophise in riddles, presumably as opposed to the desired clear language and reasoning to be associated with proper philosophy (1.6), the Chaldaeans are only concerned with astronomy and predicting the future (1.6).

The Persian Magi (1.6-9) and the Egyptian sages (1.10-11) are described in greater detail. Thus, the Magi do not consider the gods to be of human shape, they believe in two principles (*archai*), they have views concerning the origin of the gods and the permanence of the world. In reverse, they also practise divination, they forbid cremation and allow sexual intercourse between sons and mothers. The Egyptians hold opinions on primary matter and the elements, on various matters of physics and the origin of species. In reverse, they deify animals and worship those that are useful to them. Diogenes' brief discussion on these supposed originators of philosophy ends with the telling sentence "That is all concerning the invention (of philosophy)" (καὶ τὰ μὲν περὶ τῆς εὑρέσεως ὧδε ἔχει). He continues "But the first to call it philosophy and to call himself a philosopher was Pythagoras" (1.12), thereby confirming the conclusion he had reached already in 1.3-4: philosophy is a Greek affair.

In his description of the beliefs and practices of the Magi, however, Diogenes gives an impressive list of authors who have given their opinions on the Magi. All works he quotes have been lost, and several quotations appear to be mistaken. It is here that the many problems of Diogenean *Quellenforschung* make themselves cruelly felt. Diogenes has many different ways of referring to authorities he quotes[6] and much discussion has gone into the question whether Diogenes has read all authors he quotes (which is difficult to believe), or whether he has only used existing compilations (for which various candidates were proposed).[7] Since all sources he refers to have been lost, there is much room for speculation.

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[6] W. Crönert, *Kolotes und Menedemos. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Philosophen-*

Diogenes lists as authorities on the Magi the following authors: Aristotle's *Magicus*[8] and *On Philosophy*;[9] Sotion: *Succession of Philosophers* book 23 (13);[10] Hermodorus the Platonist;[11] Xanthus the Lydian; Dino: *Histories* book 5;[12] Hermippus: *On the Magi* book 1;[13] Eudoxus, *Voyage around the World*;[14] Theopompus, *Philippica* book 8; Eudemus of Rhodes;[15] Hecataeus [of Abdera];[16] and Clearchus of Soloi: *On Education*.[17]

Apart from the authors he thus mentions explicitly, it is likely that he also used either Herodotus himself or any other channel through which Herodotus' views on the Persian religion had percolated (on which, see the commentary). The presence of

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und Literaturgeschichte (Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde 6), München 1906, repr. Amsterdam 1965, 140-147 ('Zur Anführungsweise des Diogenes'); Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius*, 16-29.

[7] For these questions: Desbordes, *Introduction à Diogène Laërce*, *passim*; Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius*, 29-46.

[8] Not written by Aristotle, but on the authority of the Suda, s.v. Antisthenes, possibly by a certain Antisthenes. This is one of the books that explicitly pointed to Zoroaster as the originator of wisdom (Suda, s.v. Ἀντισθένης: [...] ἀφηγεῖται δὲ περὶ Ζωροάστρου τινὸς μάγου εὑρόντος τὴν σοφίαν).

[9] Cf. Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, 125-170; M. Untersteiner, *Aristotele. Della Filosofia* (Temi e Testi 10), Roma 1963.

[10] F. Wehrli, *Sotion* (Die Schule des Aristoteles, Supplementband II), Basel-Stuttgart 1978; Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius*, 40-42; Desbordes, *Introduction à Diogène Laërce*, vol. 1, 7-23. Sotion's *Succession of the Philosophers* did not have 23 but 13 books, whence the emendation.

[11] M.I. Parente, *Senocrate—Ermodoro: Frammenti* (La scuola di Platone 3), Napoli 1982, 157-160; 261-263; 437-444.

[12] Drews, *Greek Accounts*, 116-119.

[13] F. Wehrli, *Hermippos der Kallimacheer* (Die Schule des Aristoteles, Supplementband I), Basel-Stuttgart 1974, fr. 2-4 on pp. 11-12 with commentary on 45-47.

[14] Ph. Merlan, 'The Life of Eudoxus', in Ph. Merlan, *Studies in Epicurus and Aristotle* (Klassisch-philologische Studien 22), Wiesbaden 1960, 98-104; F. Lasserre, *Die Fragmente des Eudoxos von Knidos* (Texte und Kommentare 4), Berlin 1966; F. Gisinger, *Die Erdbeschreibung des Eudoxos von Knidos* (Stoicheia 6), Leipzig 1921, repr. Amsterdam 1967.

[15] F. Wehrli, *Eudemos von Rhodos* (Die Schule des Aristoteles VIII), Basel 1955, fr. 89 (from the *Physica*?).

[16] For recent views on Hecataeus, cf. O. Murray, 'Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 56 (1970), 141-171.

[17] F. Wehrli, *Klearchos* (Die Schule des Aristoteles III), Basel 1948.

Xanthus, Dino and Theopompus is not surprising, for they all devoted much work to the history of the Persians, as is clear from the allusions to their lost works in Athenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. Hecataeus of Abdera, who is probably meant, is not well known for his contributions to Persian history, but in view of the exact nature of the information attributed to him, viz. that the gods are subject to birth according to the Persians, Bidez and Cumont are probably correct in attributing this fragment to him and not to Hecataeus of Miletus.[18]

The other authors, Aristotle, Sotion, Hermodorus, Hermippus, Eudoxus, Eudemus and Clearchus, are all in one way or another connected with the history of philosophy. Sotion is the latest of these authors (second century BCE), and is known for his *Succession of the Philosophers* (*Diadochē*) in 13 books. This work must have been important for the historiography of philosophy in antiquity itself. It was summarised in six books by Heraclides of Lembos, who is also quoted by Diogenes.[19] Sotion's work stands at the beginning of the Greek "succession-literature", a body of texts concerned with the development of Greek philosophy by presenting it along lines of historical succession. In an important way, Diogenes' book is among the last specimens of this type of literature. Characteristic of the *Diadochai* is the precedence given to biography over doxography, the construction of a unified historical development and a passion for classification and systematisation.[20] These are all elements present in Diogenes' book as well and it seems fair to assume that he not only derived much of his information from an unknown number of these *Diadochai*, but that also the general structure of his work stands in this literary tradition. As far as can be ascertained, most *Diadochai* were little concerned with the philosophy of the Barbarians. The only author who is said to have written a book on this subject is Sotion.

The interest shown by the other authors (Aristotle, Hermodorus, Hermippus, Eudoxus, Eudemus and Clearchus) on the authority of Diogenes, is confirmed, albeit to a limited degree, in other works. Aristotle mentions the Magi in *Metaphysics* 14.1091b.

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[18] *Mages* II, 70, n. 16.

[19] For this discussion: Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius*, 40-42.

[20] For an overview of the genre, cf. Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius*, 62-74; R. Giannattasio Andria, *I frammenti delle "Successioni dei filosofi"*, Napoli 1989, 15-28, both with references.

Apart from the reference to the *Magicus*, which was not written by Aristotle, the reference to *On Philosophy* book I, in which Aristotle would have discussed Persian dualism in strikingly correct terms, is nowhere confirmed. The only other reference to Aristotle's interest in Persian religion can be found in Pliny, *Natural History* 30.3, where he is mentioned as supporting Eudoxus' view that Zoroaster lived 6,000 years before Plato. The importance of *On Philosophy* for the development of Aristotelian philosophy has been posited rather spectacularly by Jaeger, who transformed this early work, of which few explicit fragments survive, to Aristotle's *Programmschrift*, in which all the orientalising tendencies of his work revealed themselves.[21] It is difficult to attach much weight to such speculative matters; Jaeger's suggestions do not seem to have had a lasting impact on Aristotelian scholarship. Nevertheless, a certain fascination with Persian or other Oriental wisdom may have been evident in the books *On Philosophy*, which are thought to be dominated still by Platonic interests.

Hermodorus the Platonist is known (in the Iranian field) for his calculations of the date of Zoroaster and for his interest in the succession of Persian Magi after Zoroaster. The only source for this interest on Hermodorus' part is Diogenes Laertius 1.2 and 1.8 (on the etymology of the name Zoroaster). The other fragments of Hermodorus belong to works he has written on Plato. The date of Zoroaster 5,000 years before the Trojan war is so specific that the two repetitions of this idea (Pliny, *Natural History* 30.4, attributing the date to Hermippus; and Plutarch, *De Iside* 46), have been taken as evidence for the spread of Hermodorus' calculations in the ancient world.[22] Bidez and Cumont rightly compared this date with Eudoxus' calculation of Zoroaster's date, 6,000 years before Plato; it is approximately the same date, but starting from a different point of reference, viz. the Trojan war.[23]

Hermippus the pupil of Callimachus is sometimes quoted by ancient authors as one of the great authorities on the religion of the Magi. According to Diogenes Laertius 1.8, he wrote a multivolume work *On the Magi* (Περὶ Μάγων). Arnobius quotes him as authority (*Adversus Nationes* 1.52) and Pliny knows of him that he has written very accurately on the whole subject and has read and explained Zoroaster's bulky work in Alexandria. His books on the Persian religion have been lost in their entirety, and it is commonly assumed that among the 2,000,000 lines of Zoroaster he is reported to have read in the library of Alexandria, pseudo-Zoroastrian works will have been much more prominent than authentic traditions.[24]

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[21] Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, 125-170.

[22] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 13-14; II, 8, n. 3; 12, n. 7; 73, n. 4.

[23] *Mages* II, 8, n. 4; cf. now for all these matters, P. Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', *passim*.

Eudoxus of Cnidus received a place of honour in all speculations concerning the Academic interest in Persian religious ideas.[25] His main interest was in astronomy and in geography (Diogenes Laertius 8.86-91). His *Voyage around the World* is explicitly mentioned by Diogenes as one of the works describing Persian dualism, as well as, for instance, opinions about marriage held by the Massagetae and possibly the Persians (Diogenes 9.83). According to Pliny, Eudoxus considered the Persian *Mageia* to be the clearest and most useful of the schools of wisdom (*Natural History* 30.3). In the same passage, Eudoxus is also mentioned as giving the date of Zoroaster as 6,000 years before Plato's death.[26]

Eudemus of Rhodes is best known for his reference to cosmogonical speculations as found in Damascius, *Dubitationes et Solutiones* 125bis. In this passage (for which, cf. ch. 4.4.2), Eudemus discusses Persian dualism, which may confirm Diogenes' reference to his authority.

Clearchus as an authority on the Magi is otherwise unknown. Given the fact that his work *On Education* is quoted, it may be suspected that he did indeed mention the Persians, for interest in Persian education was at times very strong among certain Greeks (cf. ch. 4.8.4).

The goal of this discussion was to ascertain whether or not the authorities mentioned by Diogenes are credited elsewhere with having shown interest in Persian religion. As is well known, a strong interest in Persian religious ideas is frequently supposed to have existed among members of the Academy and the Peripatos. Diogenes' account is frequently mentioned as the most important source, but it is also sometimes discredited as being only a compilation. This appears to be unjustified. The question as to which sources were *actually* used by Diogenes

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[24] *Natural History* 30.4. Cf. *Mages* I, 21-22, 86; II, 9; Beck, *HZ* III, 508; 525-526.

[25] *Mages* I, 11-12.

[26] Cf. Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', 191-195.

(wherever he lists various authorities), is impossible to answer with greater precision. One might argue that its interest would also be limited, at least for those interested in the Iranian aspects of the prooemium. Diogenes' listing of several authors from the fourth to the second century BCE cannot be used for a discussion of the specific knowledge an individual author among them had concerning Iran.

Diogenes' discussion of a supposed Magian origin of philosophy has been characterised as "typical of what reasonably well informed Greeks would have "known" concerning the Magi."[27] As long as one keeps in mind the polemical goal of the passage in the context of Diogenes' work, this seems a fair assessment indeed.

2. *Translation*

The Chaldaeans busy themselves with astronomy and prediction, but the Magi with the worship of the gods, with sacrifices and prayers, as if the gods only listen to them. They propound their views concerning the being and origin of the gods, whom they consider to be fire, earth, and water. They condemn the use of images, and especially those who say that the gods are male and female. They hold discourse of justice, consider it impious to practise cremation, and consider it pious to have intercourse with mother or daughter, as Sotion says in his twenty-third book. And they practise divination and prediction and say that the gods appear to them. Moreover, they say that the air is filled with shapes that enter the eyes of the sharp-sighted through a stream caused by evaporation. They prohibit ornamental jewellery and the wearing of gold. Their dress is white, a straw mattress their bed, and herbs, cheese and coarse bread is their food; their staff is a reed, which, it is said, they stick into the cheese, pick it up and eat it.

They were unacquainted with black magic, says Aristotle in his first book *On Philosophy* and Dino in the fifth book of his *Histories*; he also says that Zoroaster literally interpreted means "star-worshipper". This is also told by Hermodorus. And Aristotle in his first book *On Philosophy* also says that they are older than the Egyptians; and that, according to them, there are two principles, a good demon and an evil demon: the name of the first is Zeus and Oromasdes, and that of the other Hades and Areimanios. This is also related by Hermippus in his first book *On the Magi* and by Eudoxus in the *Voyage around the World* and by Theopompus in the eighth book of his *Philippica*. He also says that according to the Magi, men shall come back to life and be immortal and that their invocations ensure the permanence of the world. This is also related by Eudemus of Rhodes. And Hecataeus says that according to them the gods are born as well. Clearchus of Soli in his *On Education* says that the Gymnosophists are descendants of the Magi. Some say that the Jews originate among these as well. Furthermore, those who have written books on the Magi criticise Herodotus, (saying) that Xerxes would never have thrown javelins at the sun and would not have sunk fetters into the sea, (for) these are traditional gods among the Magi. But that he would have destroyed statues is natural enough.[28]

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[27] Beck, *HZ* III, 520.

3. *Commentary*

The Chaldaeans busy themselves with astronomy and prediction, but the Magi with the worship of the gods, with sacrifices and prayers, as if the gods only listen to them.

The Magi spend or waste their time (διατρίβω) with the worship of the gods, sacrifices and prayers. Apparently they were so active in doing this that they gave the impression of thinking that the gods only listened to them.

Their first occupation, θεραπεία τῶν θεῶν, "the worship of the gods," is generally accorded to the Magi. At the beginning of this tradition stands the pseudo-Platonic *Greater Alcibiades* 122A, where *mageia* is explained in an almost lexicographical manner: ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο θεῶν θεραπεία ("that is the service of the gods"); this tradition can be found in several other Greek and Latin texts as well.[29] It is easy to see the need for such a statement, given the semantic development of the word *magos* in Greek, identifying much more frequently a sorcerer or quack than a Persian priest or sage.

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[28] For several suggestions concerning difficult passages, cf. Moulton, *EZ*, 413-418.

[29] Dio Chrysostomus, *Oratio* 36.41; Apuleius, *Apologia* 25-6; Porphyrius, *Vita Pythagorae* 6; *De Abstinentia* 4.16; Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.32; Hesychius, s.v. μαγεύειν. Cf. ch. 4.7.1. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 94, n. 1, have suggested Theophrastus, Περὶ εὐσεβείας, as the ultimate source of Porphyrius, Dio and Hesychius; it is difficult to see why. The extant fragments of Theophrastus' Περὶ εὐσεβείας do give some information on various rituals among non-Greek peoples

That the Magi busy themselves with worship, sacrifices and prayers is of course a fair description of the duties of most priestly classes. The Magi as caretakers of the Persian cults, as religious specialists in the field of sacrifices and prayers, occur time and again in the Classical passages describing the religion of the Persians (cf. ch. 4.7.1). The remark following Diogenes' introduction, however, clearly shows the pejorative connotations the Magi (as supposed originators of philosophy) have by necessity in Diogenes' perception of the history of philosophy: the Magi do their work with such astonishing zeal, that they give the impression that the gods only listen to them. It is not necessary to evaluate this statement in the light of Iranian data, for the remark is purely Greek and is only instructive for Diogenes' attitude towards the Greek claims of the foreign origin of philosophy.

They propound their views concerning the being and origin of the gods, whom they consider to be fire, earth, and water. They condemn the use of images, and especially those who say that the gods are male and female.

Diogenes has learned from his sources that the Magi have theories on the essence (οὐσία) and origin (γένεσις) of the gods. Bland as these remarks may be, they do contain some truth if compared with the theological parts of Zoroastrian literature.

Opinions on the essence (Phl. *gōhr*) of the gods and of the divine world abound in the Pahlavi books;[30] speculations of this type must have been widespread in priestly circles. The same is true for speculations on the origin of the gods. The essence and origin of the gods occupy the most important place in Zoroastrian cosmogonical speculations, where Ahura Mazdā is said to have created the other *yazatas* to come to his support in the battle against Angra Mainyu and his evil creations.

Diogenes does not mention the contents of the speculations on the essence and origin of the gods, apart from the fact that

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but the Magi do not appear in those fragments (cf. W. Pötscher, *Theophrastos*. ΠΕΡΙ ΕΥΣΕΒΕΙΑΣ (Philosophia Antiqua 11), Leiden 1964).

[30] An excellent treatment of these matters can be found in Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, esp. chapters 1 and 3. Cf. also Shaked, 'Notions *Mēnōg* and *Gētīg*.'

the gods are fire, earth and water. It is difficult to connect this with Zoroastrian traditions. In the Avesta it is clear that fire (Ātar), earth (Zam, Ārmaiti) and water (the Āpas, Apąm Napāt, Anāhitā) are divinities, but not that fire, earth and water are relevant for the essence or origin of the gods. The background of this information rather seems to be Herodotus' account of the Persian gods or comparable theories on the Persian gods from other Greek authors. Many Greek and Latin authors acknowledge the fact that the gods of the Persians are fire, water and earth.[31]

That Diogenes reproduces Greek rather than Iranian information on the religion of the Persians, is even clearer from the next section: the Persians despise the use of cult-statues. We are here facing one of the best known Classical theories on the religion of the Persians: they do not know cult statues but consider fire, water, the sun and the moon to be the images of their gods.[32] For this perception of religion they were much praised in certain Greek circles.[33] Diogenes then offers no new insights in these matters, but merely rephrases opinions that had a wide currency in the Graeco-Roman world (which is exactly what could be expected from his compilatory interests).

The other opinion the Magi are said to have on their gods, however, is confusing: the Magi despise most of all those who say that there are male and female gods. Bidez and Cumont tried to explain this by arguing that Diogenes followed Herodotus' chapter on the Persian religion,[34] a suggestion which will be taken up further below. Moulton preferred to attribute this doctrine to Zoroaster himself, whose own views, he thought, of the divine would have been that there are no male or female gods.[35] This enabled him to describe this as one of the "Magian" layers in Zoroastrianism, but it is wrong: in the Gāthās there are numerous references to goddesses or feminine abstract beings (Ārmaiti and Aši); the divinities are differentiated in sex according to the gender of the noun that constitutes the identifying element of the name. Moreover, most Classical authors acknowledge the existence of at least one Persian goddess (the ubiquitous Anāhitā), and some even seem to know that there are several.

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[31] These texts have been collected by Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* I, 74; *Mages* II, 67-70.

[32] E.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 5.65.1, quoting Dino.

[33] Stressed at various places by W. Burkert, e.g. 'Iranisches bei Anaximandros', pp. 97-100; 127-134; *id.*, 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', 20-22.

[34] Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 68-69, n. 5.

[35] Moulton, *EZ*, 413-414, n. 3.

Male and female divinities have clearly always existed in Zoroastrianism. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, their relations and activities do not mirror a social reality among the believers at all; the divinities do not marry, for instance, whereas marriage and procreation belong to the essential sacred duties of Zoroastrians. In other words, the divinities do not behave as men and women.[36] A further connection must be sought in the Classical *topos* of the aniconic Persian worship of the divinities: Diogenes knew the Persians despised the use of cult statues and he may have known that Herodotus had written that the Persians consider it foolish to suggest that the gods are of human nature (ἀνθρωποφυής; *Histories* 1.131). The fact that the Magi despise most of all those who say that there are male and female gods, may be a witness of Herodotus' *Nachleben* in the Greek tradition. Diogenes may have preserved an early interpretation of the rare word ἀνθρωποφυής, in explaining that the Magi despise those who attribute human qualities (a bodily appearance, as witnessed by their abhorrence of cult statues, and the differences in gender) to the gods.

Diogenes returns to the subject of Herodotus at the end of his brief description of the Magi (1.9, to be discussed below). It is likely that Diogenes knew Herodotus' work: there are two explicit references to the First book of the *Histories*, in 1.68 (Hippocrates and Chilon; cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.59) and 1.95 (Periander and Thrasybulus; cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.20). Most other references to Herodotus' work also appear to be correct.[37]

They hold discourse of justice, consider it impious to practise cremation, and consider it pious to have intercourse with mother or daughter, as Sotion says in his twenty-third book.

The Magi "hold discourse on justice" (δικαιοσύνη). In his treatment of the Egyptians, Diogenes explains his intention of describing the Egyptian philosophy as the things "concerning the gods and related to justice" (περί τε θεῶν καὶ ὑπὲρ δικαιοσύνης); these are the exact same subjects of the first two statements with regard to the Magi. The justice the Magi speak of undoubtedly reflects the Iranian concept *aša* (OP *arta-*), which has "justice" as one of its many translations. That this concept of "justice" and its related concept "truth" (ἀλήθεια) was of paramount importance to the Persians, is clear from many Classical passages. When speaking of the education, for instance, Classical authors rarely fail to mention the training in "speaking the truth" or "justice".[38] *Arta* is also mentioned in the Old Persian inscriptions and features prominently in Western Iranian onomastics.[39] The concept of the Law (OP *dāta-*) is important in the OP inscriptions and was, for instance, borrowed into the Semitic languages. Their speaking of justice is juxtaposed to what they consider to be proper and what not.

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[36] Cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', *passim*.

[37] Diogenes Laertius 1.22 with Herodotus 1.170; 1.23 with Herodotus 1.74-75; 8.2 with Herodotus 4.95. The only problematic reference to Herodotus is 9.34, which has no exact correspondence in Herodotus' *Histories*.

The Persians do not practise cremation, but do have sexual intercourse with mother and daughter. The source for this information is said to be Sotion of Alexandria, who is credited with having written a multivolume history of the philosophical schools in the second century BCE. Diogenes could have culled his information on the Persian funerary customs and the next-of-kin marriages from very many Classical authors, for they are among the most popular subjects of Classical texts concerning the Persians.

That Zoroastrianism consistently forbids cremation, is one of the eternally recurring subjects of the Iranian texts as well as an aspect of the tradition frequently discussed by Classical authors. The same is true for the promotion of *x^{v}aētvadaθa*, the next-of-kin marriage. These subjects will be treated in connection with the broad Classical tradition in the thematic part of the present book (chs. 4.8.3. and 4.8.2 respectively).

And they practise divination and prediction and say that the gods appear to them. Moreover, they say that the air is filled with shapes that enter the eyes of the sharp-sighted through a stream caused by evaporation.

That the Magi practise divination, is also a common feature of later descriptions of the Persian religion. The Magi are said to busy themselves with the interpretation of dreams (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.108 etc.), with prognostication by staring intently into the sacred fire (Agathias, *Histories* 2.25), but also with different kinds of divination: by using twigs of the tamarisk (*Scholia in Nicandri Theriaca* 613, mentioning Dino as a source), and by reading signs from corpses, dishes and water (Strabo, *Geography* 16.2.39).[40]

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[38] Herodotus, *Histories* 1.136; Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.18. The ideal of a proper education among the Persians was a popular subject among certain Greeks; a connection with the Magi is often made (pseudo-Plato, *Greater Alcibiades* I.121E-122A). Cf. ch. 4.8.4.

[39] Mayrhofer, *On Pers.* 8.572-609 etc.

The references to Iranian divination in the Classical sources are little reflected in the Iranian texts, which are almost completely confined to priestly traditions. In Arabic, Persian and Armenian literature, however, as well as in those few Pahlavi texts that are not part of the priestly texts (such as *King Khusraw and his Page*), references to all sorts of divination, especially astrology, abound.[41] A recently published Middle Persian ostracon, moreover, speaks freely of a horoscope and a fortune-teller.[42] Divination and prediction (not to mention apocalypticism, which is an important part of the "mainstream" tradition) appear to have had a very prominent place in the Iranian religious world.

That the gods appear to the believers can only be reasonably well documented for some of the more heroic figures of Zoroastrian traditions. According to the Zoroastrian tradition, Zarathustra himself saw many divine beings in person, as did his patron king Vištāspa. In fact, the apparition of divinities to humans appears to have been so normal, that in a text as conventional as the Pahlavi Dinner Speech (*Sūr saxwan*), the speaker can express the wish that his hearers may see God or the gods in their dreams.[43]

Diogenes' assertion that the air is filled with shapes that enter the eyes of the sharp-sighted has been convincingly interpreted in the light of the distinction between *mēnōg* ("spiritual") and *gētīg* ("material").[44] Apart from sense-perception open to all healthy humans, a number of texts show the possibility of obtain-ing information via the "eye of the soul" (*cašm ī gyān*).[45] In the canonical history of Zoroastrianism in Dk. IV, it is said for instance: "Know the truth of the Mazdean religion. The wise can see it in the material world through deliberation. It is possible (however) to become of supreme sanctity and a foremost leader essentially not by deliberation, but through the purity of thought, speech and action, (by) being kind to the good spirit, and (by) worship of the gods in purity through the holy word. We definitely call those persons '*mōbads* of Ohrmazd' who have made manifest to us the vision of *mēnōg*. We insistently request of them vision of *mēnōg* in an abundantly explicit manner, as well as its *gētīg* measure (brought about) by manifestation, both these kinds in complete measure."[46]

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[40] For further references, cf. ch. 4.7.1. For an introduction to Iranian divination, cf. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'La divination dans l'Iran ancien', in A. Caquot & M. Leibovici (eds.), *La divination*, Paris 1968, vol. 1, 141-155.

[41] For an overview, cf. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 80-98. Astrology is probably the main exception: the *GBd*. devotes an entire chapter to it and astrological symbolism can be found in many Pahlavi texts.

[42] A.B. Nikitin, 'Middle Persian Ostraka from South Turkmenistan', *East and West* 42.1 (1992), 103-130, Ostracon no. 6 on pp. 111-112.

[43] *Sūr saxwan* 20b (*PhlT*. 159.3-4): *xwaš xufsēd ud yazdān pad xwamn wēnēd*.

[44] Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 46-49.

The vision of Ohrmazd and the Ameša Spentas is promised to him who learns and listens and practises gentleness.[47] Diogenes' text, however, appears to be the earliest reference to the idea that the vision of *mēnōg* is reserved for those who are in the possession of special faculties. This idea is not alien to the Pahlavi texts, but is one of the traces of what can be termed an esoteric development in Sasanian Zoroastrianism.[48]

The specific wording of the perception of the forms in the air, "through an emanation from vaporisation", is impossible to connect with the rather nondescript Iranian texts. Bidez and Cumont already connected the wording and the ideas behind them with the theories of Democritus (suggesting that the information derives from Hecataeus).[49] Generally, the specific theory of the ἀπορροή or emanation in the context of sense perception (the emanation of visible objects entering the eye) is connected—both in ancient and in modern literature—with Empedocles as well as with Democritus.[50] Similarly, ideas of vaporisation (ἀναθυμίασις) are prominent in Hellenistic philosophy.[51] This, then, is a good example of the way in which possibly correct Iranian traditions are mixed up with Greek theory or with rationalisations in the process of being made understandable for Greek readers.

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[45] For this subject, cf. Gh. Gnoli, 'Ašavan. Contributo allo studio del libro di Ardā Wirāz', in: Gh. Gnoli & A.V. Rossi (eds.), *Iranica*, Napoli 1979, 387-452.

[46] DkM. 412.3ff., translated by Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 101-102.

[47] *PhlRDd* 36.14 (Williams).

[48] S. Shaked, 'Esoteric Trends in Zoroastrianism', *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 3 (1970), 175-221 (repr. in *id*., *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam. Studies in Religious History and Intercultural Contacts*, Aldershot 1995, nr. I); J.R. Russell, 'On Mysticism and Esotericism among the Zoroastrians', *IrStud* 26 (1993), 73-94.

[49] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 76-77 with n. 2.

[50] Cf., for instance, Plato, *Meno* 76CD; Aristotle, *De Sensu* 438a. For a discussion of ἀπορροή, cf. H. Dörrie, 'Emanation. Ein unphilosophisches Wort im spätantiken Denken', in K. Flasch (ed.), *Parusia. Studien zur Philosophie Platons*

They prohibit ornamental jewellery and the wearing of gold. Their dress is white, a straw mattress their bed, and herbs, cheese and coarse bread is their food; their staff is a reed, which, it is said, they stick into the cheese, pick it up and eat it.

All these qualifications ascribed to the Persians or the Magi, belong to the stock of standard information on barbarians in Greek literature. Where this information can be checked with any sort of Iranian materials, it is wrong. There is a large amount of ornamental jewellery from Iran, from Achaemenian, Parthian as well as Sasanian times.[52] Gold is spoken of very favourably in the Avesta, particularly in descriptions of divinities, but also in connection with mortals. The idea that the Persians do not wear gold is found in some other sources as well. Strabo (*Geography* 15.3.18) mentions the fact that the Persians do adorn their children with gold, but that it is forbidden to put gold on a corpse, because it resembles fire too much. Procopius (*De Bello Persico* 1.17.28), writes that it is forbidden to wear a golden ring, belt or pin, unless this is authorised by the king. Descriptions of the Persians relishing in the wearing of gold are much more common in Classical literature.[53] This curious coincidence prompted P.R.S. Moorey to suggest that the Persians in fact loved gold so very much that the Magi had to forbid those who listened to them to wear it.[54] This, however, definitely places too much trust in the Greek sources, which—by stressing either the absence or the abundance of gold among the Persians—have made the relationship between gold and barbarians one of their literary *topoi*.

The white dress noticed by Diogenes coincides with the colour of the priestly robes of the Zoroastrians in the present day.

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und zur Problemgeschichte des Platonismus, Frankfurt 1965, 119-141.

[51] Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, 30-31 discusses early examples of the idea.

[52] For an impression, cf. B. Musche, *Vorderasiatischer Schmuck von den Anfängen bis zur Zeit der Achämeniden*, Leiden 1992; *ead.*, *Vorderasiatischer Schmuck zur Zeit der Arsakiden und der Sasaniden*, Leiden 1988.

[53] Cf. the references in H.J. Horn, 'Gold', *RAC* 11 (1981), 895-930, cols. 902-903, and particularly Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 12.514e-515a.

[54] P.R.S. Moorey, 'Metalwork and Glyptic', *CHI* II (1985), 856-869, p. 857.

Whether in antiquity Persian priests also wore white clothes only, is uncertain but very likely.[55] Plutarch also writes that the Magi wear only white (*Roman Questions* 26.270E); the fact that not many ancient authors remark on this is undoubtedly connected with the predominance of the colour white for priestly clothes throughout the ancient world.[56]

The mattress, the cheese, the vegetables, even the stick used to eat the coarse bread and cheese with, all belong to a specific literary genre in the Greek descriptions of barbarian peoples (for which, cf. ch. 1.3). This particular description first of all calls in mind Pliny's story that Zoroaster lived in the desert for thirty years, eating only cheese that did not age.[57] There is little reason to connect these descriptions with Persian priestly traditions.

They were unacquainted with black magic, says Aristotle in his first book On Philosophy *and Dino in the fifth book of his* Histories; *he also says that Zoroaster literally interpreted means “star-worshipper”. This is also told by Hermodorus.*

Most editions of Diogenes Laertius give this passage as τὴν δὲ γοητιϰὴν μαγείαν οὐδ' ἔγνωσαν, but the reading τὴν δὲ γοητιϰὴν μαντείαν οὐδ' ἔγνωσαν is also found. It was the common reading in the earlier editions.[58] The reading μαγείαν was first suggested by Cobet.[59] Both readings are attested in the manuscripts. Of the modern translators, only Gigante appears to follow the reading μαντείαν.[60]

The claim that the Persian *mageia*, the “worship of the gods” traditionally guarded by the Persian Magi, was not to be connected with Greek ideas of “black magic” (*goēteia*), can be found with some regularity in Classical literature. The oldest testimony of this claim is the present quote of Aristotle and Dino. All other passages insisting upon the difference are substantially later.[61] The semantic difference between *mageia* and *goēteia*, however, appears not to have been self-evident, as the insistence of these authors upon the difference shows.[62] The word *magos* and its related concepts, as is well known, are loanwords from the Iranian designation for a priest, and continued to be used as such in a substantial part of Greek and Latin literature.[63] At the same time, however, and virtually from the earliest testimonies of the word onwards, the word in Greek simply denoted a quack, a charlatan or a magician. Early testimonies of this usage are at least as commonplace as its more specific usage to distinguish a Persian priest.[64] It therefore was necessary to stress the fact that the Magi of Persia were not magicians, and did certainly not practice the disreputable varieties of black magic that were evoked by the words *goētikē manteia/mageia*.

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[55] Cf. *HZ* II, 21; 107; 147.

[56] For some examples and references, cf. F.J. Dölger, *Antike und Christentum* 5 (1936, repr. 1976), 68-75.

[57] Pliny, *Natural History* 21.242.

[58] Such as H.G. Hübner, *Diogenis Laertii de Vitis, Dogmatis et Apophthegmatis Clarorum Philosophorum Libri Decem*, Lipsiae 1828; *Diogenis Laertii de Vitis Philosophorum Libri X* (Editio Tauchnitiana), Lipsiae 1833.

[59] C.G. Cobet, *De Clarorum Philosophorum Vitis, Dogmatibus et Aphophthegmatibus Libri Decem*, Paris 1850.

[60] M. Gigante, *Diogene Laerzio. Vite dei Filosofi*, Bari 1962, *ad locum*: “che fossero inesperti degli incantesimi della magia.”

[61] Most important of these of are Dio Chrysostomos, *Oratio* 36.40; Apuleius, *Apologia* 25-26.

Equally Greek is the etymology of the name of Zoroaster as "star-worshipper" Diogenes reproduces from Dino's *Histories*. The same etymology is also attributed to Hermodorus the Platonist. It can also be found in a *scholion* on the *Greater Alcibiades*, 1.122A.[65] The etymology proposed here, as well as all other etymologies in Greek and Latin,[66] are based—in the typical Greek manner of etymologising—on the recognition of the word ἀστήϱ, "star" in his name (cf. ch. 4.3) and the presumed connection Zoroaster had in the mind of many Greeks with matters of astrology.

And Aristotle in his first book On Philosophy *also says that they are older than the Egyptians; and that, according to them, there are two principles, a good demon and an evil demon: the name of the first is Zeus*

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[62] For the differences, cf. especially Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 144-145; W. Burkert, 'ΓΟΗΣ. Zum griechischen Schamanismus', *RhM* 105 (1962), 36-55, pp. 38-39 with nn. 11-12; A.D. Nock, 'Paul and the Magus', in F.J.F. Jackson & K. Lake (eds.), *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 5, London 1933, 164-188, reprinted in Nock, *Essays* I, 308-330, a masterly survey for its time, but now completely outdated with regard to the Iranian materials.

[63] For a more elaborate treatment of this subject, cf. ch. 4.7.1.

[64] E.g. Gorgias, *Helena* 10; Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 387; Euripides, *Oresteia* 1498. It seems significant that Plato, *Republic* 572E, also uses the word in this sense, for it is especially among his immediate successors that interest in the "real" Magi was common.

[65] For these matters, cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 6-7; II, 23-24 (*Scholion to the Greater Alcibiades*); 67-70 (Diogenes).

[66] Conveniently listed in Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, index s.v. 'Zoroastre, étymologie'.

and Oromasdes, and that of the other Hades and Areimanios. This is also related by Hermippus in his first book On the Magi *and by Eudoxus in the* Voyage around the World *and by Theopompus in the eighth book of his* Philippica.

Aristotle's claim (from his book *On Philosophy*) that the Magi are older than the Egyptians shows the typical interest in origins which pervades some of his writings. In several passages he stressed the importance of looking at earlier treatments of a subject. He also at times professed the view that the same truths appear at various times and in various places.[67] A speculation on the antiquity of various Oriental peoples, priesthoods and their philosophies, would therefore not be an unexpected item in Aristotle's work. Aristotle, moreover, had some knowledge of the Magi,[68] although it is true to say that more knowledge of the Magi is attributed to Aristotle's lost works than can be found in those still extant.

The chief rivals for the possession of the greatest antiquity of wisdom in the ancient world were the Egyptians and the Persians. Dating Zoroaster 5,000 years before Plato claimed a tremendous antiquity for Persian wisdom, but the Egyptians, in Diogenes Laertius, had an even more impressive claim: their wisdom is said to derive from Hephaistos, who lived 48,863 years before Alexander (D.L. 1.2). Such dazzling calculations obviously needed to be authoritatively settled, and Aristotle apparently decided in favour of the Persians, by stating that they were in fact older than the Egyptians.

The description of Persian dualism as given by Diogenes Laertius rests on the authority of four different authors, Aristotle, Hermippus, Eudoxus and Theopompus. Of these, Theopompus is the only author known to have written on the subject from other sources, since some quotes from his lost works have survived.[69]

The wording in which Persian dualism is rendered, referring to two *archai*, a good *daimōn* and an evil *daimōn*, can only be found in the present passage. The interpretation of the passage is clear, but it is impossible to connect the wording with specific authors. The mention of the two *archai* may or may not reflect Aristotelian interest in *archē*-speculations. The distinction between the two spirits in a good demon and an evil demon (whose names are commonplace), reflects the difficulties of classifying these beings which were already noted in the commentary on Plutarch. The present passage offers a classification that is almost unique. The two beings may be described as gods (as we noticed in Plutarch), Ahura Mazdā may be termed a god, while Angra Mainyu is termed a demon (also mentioned by Plutarch), or the two beings may both be called demons.[70] The only parallel passage in which there is clear reference to two demons, is Hippolytus, *Elenchos* 1.2.12. There, however, the distinction is made between a celestial and a chthonic daemon, which is not an Iranian distinction, and between a male and female principle, which is not Iranian either. All systems of classification at least do justice to the fact that dualism is a fundamental element of Persian doctrine and that it recognises two original individual beings, representing good and evil. The wording in which such a dualism is presented to a Greek audience, can not really be expected to be wholly compatible with Iranian distinctions. The names of the two principles, Zeus and Oromasdes for the good spirit and Hades and Areimanios for the evil one, are the common appellations of these beings.

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[67] For references, cf. Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, 131, n. 4; Chroust, *Aristotle*, vol. II, p. 208 with n. 13 on p. 424. Both these authors have devoted an entire chapter to the problem of Aristotle, On Philosophy, and the Orient: Jaeger, 'Die Programmschrift Περὶ φιλοσοφίας', in: *Aristoteles*, pp. 125-170; Chroust, 'Aristotle's *On Philosophy* and the "Philosophies of the East"', in: *Aristotle*, 206-215 with nn. on 421-430.

[68] *Metaphysica* 14.1091b.

[69] Plutarch, *De Iside* 47; Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus* 64.8-10 Colonna.

He also says that according to the Magi, men shall come back to life and be immortal and that their invocations ensure the permanence of the world. This is also related by Eudemus of Rhodes.

The reference to the resurrection accompanying the renovation is attributed to Theopompus. That he has indeed written on this subject is confirmed by two other passages quoting Theopompus as an authority on these matters: Plutarch, *De Iside* 47 and Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus* 64.8-10 Colonna. Although the three passages mentioning Theopompus as authority show significant differences,[71] they do strongly suggest that Theopompus, in the fourth century BCE, described Iranian ideas concerning the resurrection.

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[70] The fourth option, calling Angra Mainyu a god and Ahura Mazdā a demon, does not occur for obvious reasons.

[71] Plutarch omits the bodily resurrection, Aeneas explicitates this ("a resur-

Men will be brought back to life. The word Diogenes Laertius uses is also used for the reincarnations of Epimenides.[72] The resurrection is referred to twice in the Avesta. The theme is very prominent in Yt. 19,[73] but it also occurs in Vd. 18.51. This passage is part of a ritual to be performed after nocturnal pollution: "Then he shall say to Spenta Ārmaiti (the earth, A.J.): "Spenta Ārmaiti, I deliver this man to you, may you deliver this man (back) to me at the mighty Renovation as a man knowing the Gāthās, knowing the Yasna, instructed in doctrine, wise, skilled, embodying the Sacred Word." In the later tradition, as is evident from the many Pahlavi passages,[74] the theme of the resurrection came to be one of the central elements of Zoroastrian doctrine. Theopompus' account is of importance for the dating of these developments.[75]

Men will be immortal. This is an idea current throughout the Avesta. The two ideas in combination are found in Yt. 19.11 (19.19; 19.23; 19.89): "So that they make life excellent, without decay, not rotting, not putrefying, living forever, thriving forever, ruling as it wishes."[76]

Everything knows permanence through their invocations. This passage has sometimes been emended, because it is so obscure. The technicalities of these emendations are listed in Moulton's treatment of the passage (*EZ* 416-417). What seems to be implied is that through the uttering of prayers or invocations after the renovation, everything will be sustained. Prayers at the end of time do belong to the standard elements of eschatological visions (*GBd*. 34.21), as does permanence, but the exact details of Diogenes' information are impossible to check.

And Hecataeus says that according to them the gods are born as well. Clearchus of Soli in his On Education *says that the Gymnosophists are*

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rection of all dead bodies"), Diogenes offers several possibilities at interpretation.

[72] J.N. Bremmer, 'The Resurrection between Zarathustra and Jonathan Z. Smith', *NTT* 50 (1996), 89-107, p. 99.

[73] For which, cf. Hintze, *Zamyād-Yašt* 109-117.

[74] Molé, *CMC*, 113-116; Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 27-53.

[75] Cf. for the entire subject De Jong, 'Shadow and Resurrection', *passim*.

[76] Trl. A. Hintze, *Zamyād Yašt* (Iranische Texte 7), Wiesbaden 1994, 15.

descendants of the Magi. Some say that the Jews originate among these as well.

Hecataeus of Abdera is invoked as authority for the statement that among the Magi, the gods are subject to birth. He evidently was interested in this question for his researches into Egyptian religion. The statement in itself is correct. The Zoroastrian divinities are consistently described as being created by Ahura Mazdā. Frequently this dependence is symbolised in terms of family relations.[77]

What follows are some more indications of the search for the original possessors of wisdom. The authority invoked, Clearchus, is known for his interest in these matters. He is also, by a combination of passages, the only ancient author who may have suggested that the Jews are descendants of the Magi. This conclusion can only be reached, however, by combining two disparate passages from his lost works. The first is the present passage, where Clearchus (in his book *On Education*) says the Gymnosophists are descendants of the Magi. The second is the long quote from his book *On Sleep*, found in Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.177-181. In this passage, Clearchus is putting words into the mouth of his teacher Aristotle. Aristotle says that the Jews are descended from the Indian philosophers, who are called Kalanoi. The appellation of the Indian philosophers is of course different, but the confusion between Kalanoi (actually a single person, Kalanos, Plutarch, *Alexander* 65),[78] Brahmans, Gymnosophists etc. is general in Greek. The obvious inference from these two passages would be that since the Jews are descendants from the Indian philosophers and the Indian philosophers are descendants from the Magi, the Jews—in a way—are descendants from the Magi as well. This inference, however, can to my knowledge nowhere be found in Classical literature. The comparison between Jews and Indian philosophers appears to have been much more common.[79]

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[77] For some of the texts, cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore', 19 with n. 15.

[78] Similar extrapolations from one single person to a group of priests are found more often in Greek literature. Diogenes Laertius himself speaks of *Ostanai* and *Astrampsychoi* as categories of priests among the Persians; these names derive from two famous Magi, Ostanes and Astrampsychus.

[79] Eusebius repeats Clearchus' story on Aristotle, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.5; cf. also Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.15.72.4-5. For the background of these passages, cf. W. Jaeger, *Diokles von Karystos. Die griechische Medizin und die Schule des Aristoteles*, Berlin 1938 (1963^2), 134-153 ('Theophrast und der älteste griechische Bericht über die Juden').

The passage on the Magian origin of the Jews is elaborated in the great excerpt Φ: "And some said that the Gymnosophists are also descendants of the Magi. Others have also said that the Jews are (descendants) from these, because Abraham, their ancestor, was a Chaldaean."[80] The insertion has generally been considered a later addition. It is a typical instance of confusion between Magi and Chaldaeans, and one that presupposes at least some knowledge of Jewish ideas concerning their ancestry. About the background of the addition, nothing can be said with certainty. That Diogenes would have written any such thing is unlikely, because he sharply distinguishes the Chaldaeans from the Magi.

Furthermore, those who have written books on the Magi criticise Herodotus, (saying) that Xerxes would never have thrown javelins at the sun and would not have sunk fetters into the sea, (for) these are traditional gods among the Magi. But that he would have destroyed statues is natural enough.

The final information Diogenes offers on the Magi, is interesting for the history of Greek historiography on the Persians. "Those who have written books on the Magi" would seem to include several of the authorities mentioned by Diogenes. Their criticisms were aimed at a well-known story from the *Histories* of Herodotus, the flogging and fettering of the Hellespont (7.35, referred to also 8.109). The other story referred to, Xerxes throwing javelins or shooting arrows at the sun, is unknown from the *Histories*, but may be a garbled reference to 5.105, where *Darius* shoots an arrow into the air, wishing that he may reach and destroy the Athenians. Since the sun and water are divine beings in the Persian religion (and overwhelmingly so in the Greek perception of that religion), the reasoning behind the criticisms of Herodotus is obvious. The same is true for the destruction of statues. Diogenes himself had mentioned above the contempt in which the Persians hold statues of divinities, Herodotus had stressed that they think the practice ridiculous. Since all these criticisms are inner-Greek literary affairs, with little bearing on Persian reality (for instance because of the lapse in time between Herodotus and his critics), the passage is of little importance for the reconstruction of Iranian traditions.

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[80] Εἶπον δέ τινες καὶ τοὺς γυμνοσοφιστὰς ἀπογόνους εἶναι τῶν μάγων· ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἐκ τούτων εἶναι, ἐπεὶ Ἀβραὰμ ὁ τούτων πρόγονος Χαλδαῖος ἦν. Cf. A. Biedl, *Das grosse Exzerpt Φ. Zur Textgeschichte des Laertios Diogenes* (Studi e Testi 184), Città del Vaticano 1955, 112.

4. *Evaluation*

Nothing much is new in Diogenes' description of the "wisdom" of the Magi. The text has rightly been called a summary of what educated Greeks would have known on the Magi. There is some information that we do not find elsewhere, such as the belief among the Magi that the gods appear to them in visible form. The main part of the description of the Magi, however, confirms expectations of knowledge on Zoroastrian priests among interested Greeks. Diogenes' description of the ideas and customs of the Magi is mainly important for one reason: the large number of authorities on Persian religion he quotes. Among these are well-known philosophers and writers from the early Academy and the Peripatos. All works Diogenes refers to have been lost; the text therefore gives at least an impression what type of knowledge was available to those writers he quotes.

There are some serious problems involved, which limit the use that can be made of such information, however: it is beyond doubt that Diogenes did *not* read all authorities he quotes. He is often thought to have relied upon compilations of ideas and histories of philosophy that predate his own work. Nevertheless, if knowledge of Zoroastrianism was so widely ascribed to the writers Diogenes refers to, this would seem to confirm the widely held view that there were contacts between Greek philosophers and Iranian Magi in a formative period of Academic and Aristotelian philosophy.

5. *Agathias,* Histories *2.23-25*

1. *Introduction*

The *Histories* of the Byzantine lawyer Agathias are among the most important sources for the reconstruction of Sasanian history, because Agathias is the only Greek author of whom we can claim with any degree of certainty that he has put to use authentic Iranian sources.[1] This advantage over almost all other writers of Greek and Latin is mainly noticeable in his rendering of the history of the Sasanian kings, and only to a much lesser extent in his elaborate description of the religion of the Persians.

Agathias was born around 532 in Myrina in Asia Minor. He is known as Agathias Scholasticus, because his main occupation was that of lawyer (σχολαστικός) in the law-courts of Byzantium. He is known to have written several works of poetry, of which a considerable collection of epigrams survives. His only historical work is known as the *Histories*.[2] The *Histories* of Agathias are a continuation of the historical works of Procopius. They are concerned with the reign and exploits of the emperor Justinian from 552 to 559. The work is in five books and makes frequent reference to Iranian affairs. Part of the historical narrative is concerned with the wars between the Roman emperors and the Sasanian kings, a.o. for sovereignty over Lazica (Western Georgia).[3] The passage on the religion of the Persians in *Histories* 2.23-25 is found in the narrative concerning this war.

Agathias had several sources at his disposal which enabled him to write authoritatively on the matters of his time. He had of course his professional experience as a lawyer in Byzantium and the possibilities of discussing contemporary history there. He could also use Procopius' descriptions of the wars with the Persians (and others). He also used, as he mentions with some pride, authentic Iranian sources which were translated from Middle Persian for him by an interpreter called Sergius. Sergius, Agathias writes, had read the Persian royal annals, abbreviated them and rendered them into Greek (*Histories* 4.30.3-4). Agathias could put these sources to use, particularly for matters pertaining to the chronology of Sasanian kings.[4]

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[1] For introductions to Agathias' life and works, cf. A. Cameron, *Agathias*, Oxford 1970; *ead.*, 'Agathias on the Sassanians', *DOP* 23-24 (1969-1970), 69-183 (with bibliography); for Agathias' use of Persian sources, cf. also J. Suolahti, *On the Persian Sources used by the Byzantine Historian Agathias* (*Studia Orientalia* 13.9), Helsinki 1947.

[2] For editions and translations, cf. R. Keydell, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 2), Berlin 1967; J.D. Frendo, *Agathias. The Histories* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 2A), Berlin 1975; S. Costanza, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque*, Messina 1969.

[3] For which, cf. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, 287-311.

For a description of the religion of the Persians, however, these sources will have been of little value, for they were evidently concerned with matters of royal administration. The long chapters on the religion of the Persians indeed do not give the impression of being transcripts of Iranian knowledge. The lengthy and very reliable description of Persian funerary customs seems to be based on an eyewitness account of these practices. The description of other aspects of the religion, however, largely follows Greek literary traditions and a specific view of the history of the world.

Greek literary traditions in Agathias' description of the Persian religion are not attributed to a specific source. Agathias does mention three authors as his source: Berossus, Athenocles and Simacus (*Histories* 2.24). Berossus is of course well-known as an authority on Babylonian history, but there is nothing in Agathias' description of the Persian religion that can be directly attributed to him. The other two authors, Athenocles and Simacus, are wholly unknown. Throughout Agathias' description, traces of information from Herodotus and Ctesias appear. After a careful investigation of these traces of Herodotus, however, Cameron concluded that Agathias did not make direct use of the *Histories* of Herodotus, but that he used Procopius, some popular reworkings of Herodotus on military matters and probably, as a supreme authority on Persian matters, Ctesias.[5] The influence of Ctesias is particularly noticeable in Agathias' lengthy description of Persian incest, which he bases on popular themes from Ctesias (see below).

Agathias was a Christian and a moralist. His descriptions of the Persian customs are interspersed with judgments on the degeneration that characterised the Persians as far as their religion was concerned. Here, as in many other authors, the Persian funerary customs and the incestuous marriages are the main characteristics attributed to the Persians, and they are thoroughly rejected. This rejection is partly based on a peculiar view of the history of the world. Agathias knows that the Assyrians and the Medes had ruled "the East" before the Persians. This knowledge cannot be entirely unconnected with the Biblical and later Judaeo-Christian schemes of dynastic succession (Assyrians-Medes-Persians-Alexander).

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[4] Suolahti, *Persian Sources*, *passim*. Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sassanians', 69-70, is much more sceptical.

[5] A. Cameron, 'Herodotus and Thucydides in Agathias', *BZ* 57 (1964), 33-52.

Throughout his description of Persian customs, he contrasts these with those of the earliest inhabitants of the region. These inhabitants, it seems, changed with the kings ruling them: the Assyrians and Medes had different funerary traditions, because tombs and graves can still be found in Babylonia and Media. In similar passages, however, he appears to suggest that the *Persians* were the inhabitants of the region, and that they changed their customs. Thus, a story on Semiramis is used to illustrate that the incestuous marriages were not an original part of the *Persian* customs. The same also applies partly to the funerary traditions: the tombs and graves from Babylon and Media suggest that the rites of exposure were an innovation even among the Persians.

The turning point in the customs of the Persians is Zoroaster. Agathias frankly admits that he does not know when Zoroaster lived. But Zoroaster is held responsible for the degeneration of the Persian customs. This enables Agathias to lump together in his description of the Persian religion *before* Zoroaster evidence from Babylonian and Iranian traditions. It also enables him to reconstruct a "pure" pre-Zoroastrian religion which was perverted not only by Zoroaster, but also by Chaldaean and pagan influences.

Agathias distinguishes several religions: paganism, Zoroastrianism, and the unnamed tradition: Christianity, which seems to be the standard against which the traditions of the Persians are measured. He compares Zoroastrianism with Manichaeism and finds them similar. But above all, he describes the customs of the Persians as an amalgam of various disparate customs, moulded into a monstrous whole by Zoroaster. Apart from the very technical description of the Persian funerary traditions, it is unlikely that his description of the Persian religion owes much to his privileged position of having had access to authentic Iranian materials.

2. *Translation*

At that time then the attendants of Mermeroes took up his body and removed it to a place outside the city and laid it there as it was, alone and uncovered according to their traditional custom, as refuse for dogs and horrible carrion birds. For this is the Persian funeral practice: the flesh is removed in this way and the exposed bones rot, scattered at random all over the plain. They consider it irreligious to place the dead in a tomb or container, or even to bury them in the ground. And if the birds do not fly down upon a body quickly, or if the dogs do not come up at once and tear it to pieces, they hold that this man was profane in his ways and that his soul is wicked and doomed, given over to the power of evil. So then his relatives mourn all the more for the dead man, thinking him truly perished and with no share in the higher life. But if a body is devoured quickly they congratulate the dead man on his good fortune and marvel at his soul, believing that it is virtuous and godlike and destined for the dwelling of the power of good.

As for the mass of ordinary people, if they should be seized by a serious disease while in the army, they are carried out while still alive and breathing. When a man is exposed like this, he is supplied with a lump of bread, water, and a stick. As long as he is able to taste the food, and while some strength remains to him, he keeps off the marauding animals with this stick and scares off the feasters. But if, before he is completely finished, the disease overcomes him to the extent that he can no longer move his hands, then they devour the poor wretch while he is still only half dead and only just beginning to give up the ghost, cutting off his hopes of possible survival. For there are many who have before now recovered their strength and returned home. They are like actors on the stage, in a tragedy who have come from the "gates of darkness," feeble and cadaverous, fit to terrify those they meet. If a man does return like this, everyone turns away from him and avoids him as though he is accursed and still in the service of the infernal powers. He is not allowed to resume his former way of life until the pollution, as it were, of his expected death has been exorcised by the Magi, and he can take in exchange, so to speak, his renewal of life.

Those early inhabitants of the place did not hold the beliefs held today, whether in the matter of funeral rites or in the lawless marriage custom. The Persians of today have an abominable practice—not only do they shamelessly sleep with their sisters and nieces, but even fathers with daughters, and worst of all, O law and nature! sons with their mothers. That this too is an innovation can be clearly seen from the following: it is said that the famous Semiramis, the Assyrian, was driven to such a pitch of wantonness as to desire intercourse with her son Ninyas, and actually approached the young man. He angrily refused, and finally, when he saw that she was excited and pressing him, he killed his mother, preferring this pollution to the other. Yet if this had been allowed by law, it seems to me that Ninyas would never have come to such violence. What need to cite examples from such ancient times? Not long before the Macedonians and the fall of the Persians, they say that Artaxerxes the son of Darius was in the same position, for his mother Parysatis had the same passion as Semiramis and wanted to sleep with him. He did not kill her, but he recoiled in anger and pushed her away, as though this was neither righteous nor customary nor natural in human life.

But the Persians of today neglect and spurn nearly all their earlier practices, and have adopted new ways which might be described as bastard, seduced by the teaching of Zoroaster the son of Horamasdes. When this Zoroaster or Zarades (for he is called by two names) first flourished and made his laws is impossible to discover with certainty. The Persians of today say that he was born in the time of Hystaspes, without further qualification, so that it is very obscure and impossible to tell whether this Hystaspes was the father of Darius or someone else. But at whatever time he flourished, he was their teacher and guide in the rites of the Magi; he replaced their original worship by complex and elaborate doctrines.

In ancient times they worshipped Zeus and Cronos and all the familiar gods acknowledged by pagans, except that they did not use the same names. They called Zeus Bel, say, and Heracles Sandes, and Aphrodite Anaitis, and the rest by other names, as is somewhere recorded by Berossus the Babylonian and Athenocles and Simacus, who wrote the ancient history of the Assyrians and Medes. But now they resemble in most respects the so-called Manichaeans, insofar as they hold that the first principles are two, one good, the source of all that is best in creation, the other the opposite in both respects. They give them barbarian names in their own language. The good spirit or creator they call

Hormisdates, and Arimanes is the name of the bad, destructive one.

Their greatest festival is that called the "Removal of Evil," when they kill large numbers of serpents and other wild and desert-living creatures and bring them to the Magi as though as a sign of piety. In this way, they believe that they are doing what pleases the good spirit, while vexing and offending Arimanes. They honour water greatly, to the extent that they neither wash their faces in it nor touch it in any other way except for drinking and the nurture of crops.

They have names for and worship many other gods too. [That is pagan] They practise sacrifice and purification and divination. [That is also pagan] Fire they hold to be worthy of reverence and very holy, and for this reason the Magi keep it unquenched in certain holy buildings, set apart, and look toward it while performing their secret rites and inquiring about the future. This practice they derived I believe from the Chaldaeans or from some other people, for it does not accord with the rest. In this way it seems that their faith, to which so many different peoples have contributed, has become very complicated. This seems very understandable. I do not know of any other state which has assumed so many forms and shapes, not able to remain for long in the same form but suffering the domination of countless different peoples at different times. So it is very natural that it should preserve the signs of so many types and customs.[6]

3. *Commentary*

At that time then the attendants of Mermeroes took up his body and removed it to a place outside the city and laid it there as it was, alone and uncovered according to their traditional custom, as refuse for dogs and horrible carrion birds. For this is the Persian funeral practice: the flesh is removed in this way and the exposed bones rot, scattered at random all over the plain. They consider it irreligious to place the dead in a tomb or container, or even to bury them in the ground. And if the birds do not fly down upon a body quickly, or if the dogs do not come up at once and tear it to pieces, they hold that this man was profane in his ways and that his soul is wicked and doomed, given over to the power of evil. So then

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[6] Translated by Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sassanians', with some minor changes.

his relatives mourn all the more for the dead man, thinking him truly perished and with no share in the higher life. But if a body is devoured quickly they congratulate the dead man on his good fortune and marvel at his soul, believing that it is virtuous and godlike and destined for the dwelling of the power of good.

Agathias' description of Persian funerary ideology and practice is the most elaborate Greek reference to a practice that was well known throughout the ancient world. The general considerations on the practice will be treated in ch. 4.8.3; it will therefore be sufficient to make some introductory remarks and pay special attention to the peculiarities of Agathias' information.

In Agathias' times, the exposition of dead bodies to be eaten by dogs and vultures was already an ancient practice. His later remarks on the introduction of the practice, which he judged to be specifically Persian (2.23.9-10), need to be seen in the light of his general classification of history as the history of ruling peoples. Only when the Persians took over sovereignty over the vast lands of Iran and the adjacent regions, did the practice gain prominence. Agathias illustrates this by referring to the existence of tombs and graves (τύμβοι τε καὶ θῆκαι) in Babylonia and Media. That this accords with broad outlines of the history of Zoroastrianism (in particular with the fact that Herodotus still mentions burial alongside exposition in *Histories* 1.140), is a coincidence. Recent archaeological explorations and investigations, moreover, have made it clear that inhumation was still practised in Iran well into the Sasanian period.[7] Nevertheless, the abundance of references to the practice of exposition in Classical literature as well as the insistence upon the practice in the Vendīdād and Pahlavi literature, strongly suggest that exposition was intimately linked with a "Zoroastrian identity."

The treatment of the body of Mermeroes, which was taken outside of the city and left there, uncovered, to be eaten by dogs and vultures, accords very well with this funerary ideology. According to Agathias, Mermeroes died during the wars between Byzantines and Persians for control of Lazica and other parts of Western Georgia.[8] Mermeroes died in Mtskheta in ancient Iberia, a region that had once been thoroughly impregnated with the Zoroastrian religion. At the time when Mermeroes died, however, the region was fully Christianised. The presence of Zoroastrians or of Zoroastrian institutions can therefore not really be expected in Iberia in that period. Consequently, a Zoroastrian funeral in a *daxma* (for which, cf. ch. 4.8.4) must have been impossible. Therefore, the attendants of Mermeroes resorted to another option sanctioned by the Vendīdād: leaving the dead body *outside of the city*, in the open. That this is indeed sanctioned in the Vendīdād is clear from, e.g., Vd. 6.44-46: "Where shall we bring the body of deceased men, Ahura Mazdā, where shall we lay it down? [...] On the highest places, Spitama Zarathustra, so that the corpse-eating dogs or the corpse-eating birds will spot him with the greatest certainty. There those Mazdā-worshippers shall bind that corpse with its feet and with its hair, (by using) a piece of iron, a piece of stone or a piece of horn (?), lest a corpse-eating dog or a corpse-eating bird take something of those bones to the waters and the plants."[9] This rule, laid down in the Avesta, can be found repeated many times in the Pahlavi books, which also greatly elaborate upon the theme.[10] The action of Mermeroes' attendants, as repulsive as they may have seemed to Agathias, were strictly according to the rules of Zoroastrian orthodoxy.

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[7] For references, cf. ch. 4.8.3.

[8] For Mermeroes, cf. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, 298-307.

What is not strictly in accordance with the prescriptions, however, is to leave the bones scattered across the plain. One can easily think of examples where this was the only option. Battlefields appear to have been among the clear instances where the corpses were left and the bones remained scattered across the plain. There is no Iranian textual material to relate this to (as there are no genuine records of battles), but there are references to it in Classical literature, which we are in no position to disbelieve. It is of course true that for any Greek not burying the dead after battle is one of the most revolting acts anyone can possibly commit.[11] Referring to the enemies doing just that may of course be partly connected with polemical goals, but in the case of the Persians, these two matters—the actual practice and the accusations of the practice—cannot be disentangled. This problem is especially acute in cases where the mutilation of the body by wild beasts is mentioned, because this was a *topos* from the days of Homer onwards.[12]

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[9] *kuua narąm iristanąm tanūm barāma ahura mazda kuua nidaθāma? āat̰ mraot̰ ahurō mazdå barəzištaēšuuaca paiti gātušuua spitama zaraθuštra yaδōit̰ dim bāiδištəm auuazanąn sūnō vā kərəfš.x*^{v}*ārō vaiiō vā kərəfš.x*^{v}*ārō. aētaδa hē aēte mazdaiiasna aētəm iristəm nidarəzaiiən hauuaēibiia pāδaēibiia x*^{v}*aēpaθiiāca varsa aiiaŋhaēnəm vā zarštuuaēnəm vā frauuāxšaēnəm vā yezi nōit̰ sūnō vā kərəfš.x*^{v}*arō vaiiō vā kərəfš.x*^{v}*arō aētaŋhąm astąm auui apąmca uruuaranąmca barəṇtəm frajasąn.*

[10] *DD*. 14.5; 16.17; 17.1-3; *PhlRivAdFr* 93; 96; 109 etc.

[11] For Homeric allusions to the practice, cf. J.-P. Vernant, 'La belle mort et le cadavre outragé', in: Gh. Gnoli & J.-P. Vernant (eds.), *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes*, Cambridge-Paris 1982, 45-76, pp. 68-71. For exhaustive ref-

Herodotus refers twice to the treatment of Persian war casualties. In *Histories* 8.24-25, he relates how Xerxes buried 19,000 of his war dead after the battle of Thermopylae, leaving 1,000 unburied as a trick to disguise the actual number of casualties for those whom he had invited to inspect their numbers. In *Histories* 3.12, he describes the bones and skulls of Egyptians and Persians that had remained unburied after the battles of Pelusium.

Agathias and his predecessor Procopius knew the practice of leaving corpses unburied very well; they relate many convincing stories on the theme. Procopius mentions how Seoses, one of the high-ranking officers of the Sasanian army, was condemned to death, because he had buried his wife (*De bello Persico* 1.11.35). The Persian king Kavad urged Gourgenes, king of the Christian Iberians, to adopt the Persian customs, and especially never to bury a corpse (*De bello Persico* 1.12.4). Agathias writes of two Greeks who happened to find a corpse lying unburied. Out of piety towards the deceased, they buried it. That night, they had a dream in which a man appeared who warned them not to bury what should be left unburied. When they returned the next day, it had been unearthed again, by some Persians out of piety towards the deceased and towards the earth (*Histories* 2.31).

The following details Agathias gives, that the swiftness with which the body is devoured reveals something concerning the virtues or sins of the soul of the deceased, is difficult to connect with early Iranian traditions. Similar beliefs can be found in the reports of European travellers on the Zoroastrians of Iran and India,[13] and also in Persian Zoroastrian literature.[14] It is typical of

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erences to the practice in situations of war, W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The Greek State at War. Part IV*, Berkeley etc. 1985, ch. II: 'Burial of Greek War Dead', 94-259, esp. 235-241. The fear of remaining unburied is also expressed in Mesopotamian literature; cf. E. Cassin, 'Le mort: valeur et représentation en Mésopotamie', in Gnoli & Vernant (eds.), *La mort, les morts*, 355-372.

[12] For the theme in Homer, cf. C. Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad* (Mnemosyne Suppl. 17), Leiden 1971.

[13] Firby, *European Travellers*, 48-49.

[14] Cf. M. Boyce, 'Corpse', *EIr* 6 (1993) 279-286, p. 281.

this type of popular belief that it is scarcely recorded in the extant Zoroastrian texts. What is recorded abundantly, the question of whether the corpse feels it when it is torn, points to similar ideas. Mānuščihr devoted three chapters to the question (*DD*. 14-16). In *DD*. 15, he enters upon the subject of whether or not the soul experiences the tearing apart of the corpse by dogs and birds. In the answer he differentiates between what is experienced by the soul of a righteous man and the soul of a sinner. "That soul which one recognises as sweet and immortal leaves the body together with the vivifying soul, the consciousness which causes feeling and the other instruments of life. The body, which is powerless, motionless and without perception, has no pain whatsoever, and in the end does not feel and does not perceive."[15] The soul of a sinner realises the fact that he is doomed; he did not use his corporeal existence to abstain from sin and accumulate virtue, and "therefore longs back to his corporeal existence; and the tearing apart is very painful to him, because the body [...] is rendered powerless and destroyed completely [...]."[16] The soul of a righteous person again knows "great joy arising from the movement towards the best existence" (*wuzurg urwāhmīh ī az ēwarz ī ō pāšom axwān*; *DD*.15.5). Thus, in the mind of a great theologian, there is a direct link between the devouring of the body and the fate of the soul. The information Agathias offers seems to be a more popular elaboration upon this theme.[17]

The terminology used by Agathias for the fortune of the soul, is interesting as well. The life and soul of a sinner and the life and soul of a righteous man are mentioned with opposing qualities. The sinner's life was "profane (βέβηλος) in manners", his soul is "unjust, doomed (βαραθρώδης, "abysmal", "like a pit") and given over to the evil spirit". His end will be to have truly died and not to share in the higher life. The righteous man, on the contrary, is blessed, and his soul is excellent, godlike and "destined for the dwelling of the power of good."

Although this terminology does not correspond exactly with

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[15] *ruwān kē xwaš ud ahōš dānēd abāg gyān zīwēnāg <ast be> bōy ī sōhēnāg ud abārīgān gyān abzārān az tan šawēd. Tan agār ud ajumbāg ud amārišn ēc dard ud frazām-iz nē mārēd nē sōhēd*. (*DD* 15.2)

[16] *ēg-iš abāz ō tanōmandīh ārzōgīhēd u-š darrēnišn owōn garān bawēd kū tan rāy [...] *hanjāmānīhā agārīhēd ud wišōbīhēd* (*DD*. 15.3-4).

[17] For a similar evaluation of the perception of the body being devoured, cf. *PhlRDd*. 24.

Zoroastrian terminology, it does offer the traditional imagery connected with the fate of souls after death. The ultimate goal of mankind is to reach the "best existence" (*pāšom axwān—pahlom axwān* etc.), which is only attainable for the righteous souls.[18] The information on the fate of the evil souls after the renovation in Pahlavi literature is contradictory. Mānušcihr clearly implies a complete purification from sin for the evil souls, through the molten metal, after which they will be immortal and blessed (*DD*. 31.10-13; 36.110-111); other traditions teach a destruction of the souls of sinners at the renovation.[19] If Agathias' information derives from an Iranian informant, the mention of the evil one having "truly died" seems to imply the latter view, even if this is not entirely supported by the Pahlavi books.

As for the mass of ordinary people, if they should be seized by a serious disease while in the army, they are carried out while still alive and breathing. When a man is exposed like this, he is supplied with a lump of bread, water, and a stick. As long as he is able to taste the food, and while some strength remains to him, he keeps off the marauding animals with this stick and scares off the feasters. But if, before he is completely finished, the disease overcomes him to the extent that he can no longer move his hands, then they devour the poor wretch while he is still only half dead and only just beginning to give up the ghost, cutting off his hopes of possible survival. For there are many who have before now recovered their strength and returned home. They are like actors on the stage, in a tragedy who have come from the "gates of darkness," feeble and cadaverous, fit to terrify those they meet. If a man does return like this, everyone turns away from him and avoids him as though he is accursed and still in the service of the infernal powers. He is not allowed to resume his former way of life until the pollution, as it were, of his expected death has been exorcised by the Magi, and he can take in exchange, so to speak, his renewal of life.

The information Agathias offers on the treatment of lower-ranking Persian soldiers suffering from a serious disease has mostly been explained as a mistake caused by the occurrence of similar customs among the peoples surrounding the Persians.[20] This, however, appears to be wrong. The practice of killing the elderly and the seriously ill has been attributed in Classical literature to many peoples surrounding and including the Persians.[21] What Agathias describes, however, is something different.

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[18] Stressed in almost all Pahlavi texts, e.g. *MX* 2; 7 etc.; *DD*. 30-31.; *PhlRDd*. 23. For further references, cf. Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, vol. 2, 172, n. 1.

[19] *HZ* I, 242-244.

[20] Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 199-200; Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sasanians', 91.

Agathias does not give general practices of the treatment of the elderly and the sick, but gives specific information on what is done with seriously ill lower-ranking soldiers. The reason for singling out the fact that it is only the "mass of ordinary people" who are so treated, is connected with the preceding laborious story of how the leader of the army, Mermeroes, was treated when he was terminally ill. Mermeroes was carried around and brought to Mtskheta; the mass of ordinary people is simply left behind to die.

We know from Procopius that serious plagues (probably the bubonic plague) threatened large parts of the world in the sixth century (*De Bello Persico* 2.22-23; 2.24.8;12). Procopius calls the disease λοιμός, "plague" or "pestilence", or simply νόσος, "disease." Both words can cover a wide range of diseases which are now known.[22] The Avestan word for leprosy, *paēsa-*, occurs in two passages only. In Yt. 5.92, a person who suffers from leprosy is included in a list of persons unfit to taste of the offering to Anāhitā. In Vd. 2.29 (= 2.37), the sufferer from leprosy is not allowed to enter the *war* Yima makes, a Zoroastrian Noah's ark, in which the seed of the most excellent humans, animals and plants are kept to be released at the end of times. In both texts, the sufferer from leprosy is called *vītərətō.tanu-*, which means "whose body is taken out" or "whose body is isolated".[23] The

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[21] Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.45; Strabo, *Geography* 11.11.3; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.4.7; Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander* 1.5.328C; Porphyrius, *De Abstinentia* 4.21. For the practice of abandoning or killing the elderly and the deceased in an Iranian context, cf. *HZ* III, 6-8; the suggested interpretation of the passages, as deriving from a confusion between Zoroastrian funerary rites and actual practices among non-Iranian peoples, is unconvincing. For a broader perspective, cf. F. Paudler, *Die Volkserzählungen von der Abschaffung der Altentötung* (FF Communications 121), Helsinki 1937; J. Koty, *Die Behandlung der Alten und Kranken bei den Naturvölkern* (Forschungen zur Völkerpsychologie und Soziologie 13), Stuttgart 1934; K.E. Müller, 'Zur Frage der Altentötung im westeurasiatischen Raum', *Paideuma* 14 (1968), 17-44; K. Jettmar, 'Altentötung in Dardistan', *Paideuma* 15 (1969), 162-166; Bremmer, *Early Greek Concept*, 103-104. For the theoretical problems connected with this type of information, cf. W. Arens, *The Man-eating Myth. Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, New York 1979. For further materials, cf. ch. 4.8.3.

[22] For introductions to the subject, cf. H.F.J. Horstmanshoff, *De pijlen van de pest. Pestilenties in de Griekse wereld 800-400 v.C.*, Diss. Leiden 1989; W.H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, New York 1976.

[23] Bartholomae, *AIrWb* 1441; 639-640.

Vendīdād passage qualifies all sufferers from diseases mentioned in the list as those carrying the diseases "which [are] a sign of Angra Mainyu that is placed upon mortals."[24] What little information we can grasp from these two (formulaic) passages at least shows that all sufferers from illness are considered to have been afflicted by the Evil Spirit (which is often repeated in the tradition), and that those who suffered from leprosy should be isolated from the others.

The isolation of people when they are in a state of uncleanness is best attested for women in menses. They were isolated in a separate chamber, the *daštānistān*, and were to have no contact whatsoever with the outside world.[25] A different institution was the *armēšt-gāh*, another place of seclusion, not for menstruating women but for sick or infirm people.[26]

Offering hospitality to those who are sick, infirm or travelling is a virtuous deed (*MX* 37.36) that increases hope of attaining heaven. The texts we have, however, both on women in menses and on sufferers from various diseases, are clearly texts that presuppose a sedentary existence. The *daštānistān* and the *armēšt-gāh* are separate rooms or buildings specifically intended for the seclusion of men and women in periods of uncleanness. The situation at army camps must have been totally different.

Herodotus and Ctesias are the main sources for the treatment of lepers among the Persians. Herodotus says: (*Histories* 1.138): "If any of the citizens suffers from *lepra* or *leukē* (two kinds of skin disease resembling leprosy, A.J.) he does not go into the city and does not mingle with the other Persians. For they say he suffers from this because he has committed a sin against the sun. And every stranger who has been taken with these (diseases), most of them expel from the area, and also the white doves, for which they give the same reason." Ctesias (in Photius, *Library* 72.42-45), relating a story on Megabyzos, writes: "When Megabyzos had spent five years in exile, he fled pretending to be a leper (*pisagas*); for among the Persians a leper is called *pisagas*, and he may not be approached by anyone." Ctesias thus not only offers additional evidence for the correctness of Herodotus' statement that lepers cannot have contact with other men and women, but also gives the correct Persian word (**paēsa-ka, pēsag*) for "leper".

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[24] *yōi aŋrahe mańiiəuš daxštəm maṣ̌āišca paiti niδātəm.*

[25] Modi, *CC* 171-175.

[26] The evidence for this institution is meagre in comparison with the *daštānistān*. The rules applying to women in menses also apply to those who are sick or infirm; cf. ŠnŠ 2.98; for the *armēšt-gāh*, cf. Vd. 9.33-35, with the Phl. translation. And cf. H. Humbach, 'ProtoGermanic **arma-* 'poor' and its Cognates' in: *Sprachwissenschaftliche Forschungen. Festschrift für Johann Knobloch* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft 23), Innsbruck 1985, 189-193.

Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 23.4-5, writes that Artaxerxes so much loved his wife Atossa, that even when she suffered from leprosy (*alphos*), he was not in the least disgusted by this, but prayed to Hera on her behalf. If this passage reflects Iranian concepts rather than Orientalising pieces of storytelling at all (cf. ch. 4.1.2), it also shows a similar "normal" reaction to leprosy to which Artaxerxes' behaviour was clearly an exception.

We thus have some information relating to the treatment of those who suffer from what may be included in Agathias' category of a "serious disease." The treatment of this disease consists largely of seclusion. The seclusion compulsory for those living in villages and cities—where a separate *armeštgāh* would have been available—was impossible to observe among itinerant armies. That these would simply have driven out sufferers of serious contagious diseases, then, observing as best as they can their ancestral prescriptions, appears a likely interpretation of the custom as described by Agathias. This becomes even more likely in view of the treatment of those who recover.

The treatment of those who recover from their disease and return to the camp—described in great detail—is understandable from what little is known from Iranian ideas on sickness and health.[27] He who returns is avoided "as though he is accursed and still in the service of the evil spirit." The evil spirit is responsible for all diseases with which mankind is afflicted, and any disease is considered to be Ahreman's mark (*Vd.* 2.29). When recovered, he must undergo the greater purification ritual (*barašnom*), to cleanse him from having suffered a bodily affliction from the evil beings. Until that time, he is still unclean and must be avoided at all costs. What Agathias describes as a ritual to exorcise the pollution and the subsequent acceptance of the new life of the recovered person, is undoubtedly a reference to the greater *barašnom*, and as such the only surviving allusion to this ritual in Greek literature.[28]

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[27] The study of ancient Iranian medicine is not particularly well developed. For introductions, cf. D. Brandenburg, *Priesterärtzte und Heilkunst im alten Persien. Medizinisches bei Zarathustra und im Königsbuch des Firdausi*, Stuttgart 1969; J. Hampel, *Medizin der Zoroastrier im vorislamischen Iran* (Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften 45), Husum 1982.

Summing up, then, Agathias' description of the treatment of sufferers of serious diseases *in army camps*, appears to be based on sound observations; in spite of the obvious depreciating language used in his description of the practice, several elements of it seem to accord well with what little is known of the treatment of those who are seriously ill. This is all the more so, if one imagines (and imagining is all that is possible, for lack of solid documentary evidence) the differences that must have existed between keeping the rules of purity in a sedentary environment or while one the move with a massive army.

Those early inhabitants of the place did not hold the beliefs held today, whether in the matter of funeral rites or in the lawless marriage custom. The Persians of today have an abominable practice -not only do they shamelessly sleep with their sisters and nieces, but even fathers with daughters, and worst of all, O law and nature! sons with their mothers. That this too is an innovation can be clearly seen from the following: it is said that the famous Semiramis, the Assyrian, was driven to such a pitch of wantonness as to desire intercourse with her son Ninyas, and actually approached the young man. He angrily refused, and finally, when he saw that she was excited and pressing him, he killed his mother, preferring this pollution to the other. Yet if this had been allowed by law, it seems to me that Ninyas would never have come to such violence. What need to cite examples from such ancient times? Not long before the Macedonians and the fall of the Persians, they say that Artaxerxes the son of Darius was in the same position, for his mother Parysatis had the same passion as Semiramis and wanted to sleep with him. He did not kill her, but he recoiled in anger and pushed her away, as though this was neither righteous nor customary nor natural in human life.

In this treatment of the custom of next-of-kin marriages, Agathias shows his general attitude towards the development of history, as well as a somewhat garbled acquaintance with the custom of *xwēdōdah*. As it is *a priori* unlikely that a Christian author from a different culture would understand *xwēdōdah* or represent it in neutral terms, the description of the practice is comparable to what one would expect to find. Of some interest is the fact that

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[28] On the barašnom, see Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, 23-52.

Agathias works with a view of history that is much influenced by the schematising approach found in particular in Christian sources. This approach is dominated not by an ethnic perspective—what the Persians do in contrast with the Babylonians—but by a perspective originating in the scheme of successive ruling powers. Thus, the funeral rites of the Persians are judged to be a relatively late innovation, because the peoples or dynasties that preceded them, Assyrians and Medes, did not observe the same customs. The fact that the Persians took over the dominance from the Medes, who had taken it from the Assyrians, meant (in Agathias' representation) a disappearance of the Median or Assyrian funeral customs.

The same scheme of things underlies the treatment of the marriage customs. The observance of *xwēdōdah*, found among the Persians of Agathias' time, is contrasted with a story relating the aversion Ninyas, the son of Semiramis felt towards having intercourse with his mother.[29] The Achaemenian Persian example Agathias gives, of Artaxerxes II, the son of Darius II and Parysatis, who wanted to have sex with her son, is loosely based on a story found in Ctesias. In this case, however, we know that it must be a fabrication, because the custom of *xwēdōdāh* was well established in the late Achaemenian period and Ctesias is thought to be one of the authors reporting on the custom (cf. ch. 4.8.3).[30]

But the Persians of today neglect and spurn nearly all their earlier practices, and have adopted new ways which might be described as bastard, seduced by the teaching of Zoroaster the son of Horamasdes. When this Zoroaster or Zarades (for he is called by two names) first flourished and made his laws is impossible to discover with certainty. The Persians of today say that he was born in the time of Hystaspes, without further qualification, so that it is very obscure and impossible to tell whether this Hystaspes was the father of Darius or someone else. But at whatever time he flourished, he was their teacher and guide in the rites of the Magi; he replaced their original worship by complex and elaborate doctrines.

Agathias here introduces Zoroaster as representing a turning point in Persian religious history. His information is interesting for the awareness it shows of several historical difficulties with regard to Zoroaster and his time. The "new" religion of the realm, introduced by the advent of the Persians after Assyrians and Medes, is described as being based on the teaching of Zoroaster, the son of Horamasdes. The tradition claiming Zoroaster to be the son of Ahura Mazdā, is also found in Pseudo-Plato's *Greater Alcibiades*, but was not widespread among Greek writers (cf. ch. 4.1.1). Agathias is the only author to reproduce it; an earlier interpretation of the same text (Apuleius, *Apology* 26) shows a better understanding of what might have been implied by Pseudo-Plato.

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[29] For incest in the stories on Semiramis, cf. A.M. Capomacchia, *Semiramis. Una femminilità ribaltata*, Roma 1986, 26-29.

[30] Thus Cameron, 'Herodotus and Thucydides in Agathias', 38-39 (with references).

Of definite interest is the fact that Agathias equates Zoroaster and Zarades as being merely two different names for the same person. This was occasionally doubted in Classical literature, as it has been occasionally doubted in nineteenth-century academic writing.[31]

Agathias also reports on the only historical detail of the Iranian prophet's life on which there is an absolute unanimity in the tradition: Zoroaster flourished during the reign of Hystaspes. The evident problem arising as to who this Hystaspes was, the father of Darius or someone else known by that name, has continued to be discussed well into the present century.[32] That Hystaspes/Vištāspa was the first convert of Zoroaster was of course known already to the Greeks (and other ancient peoples), who are virtually unanimous in providing him with the appellation "king".[33]

Zoroaster's accomplishments are summarised as teaching the "rites of the Magi" and replacing an original, simple religion by complex and elaborate doctrines. That Zoroaster was the teacher of the rites of the Magi is, of course, a common *topos*, but the historical picture Agathias introduces here, owes more to Agathias' mind than to what he would have learned from Persian informants. The words used for the doctrines, "complex" (παμμιγής) and "elaborate" (ποικίλος) are not meant to inspire admiration as to the intricacies of Persian doctrine or ritual, but refer to a process of bastardisation, for which Agathias blames Zoroaster, as is clear from the following paragraphs.

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[31] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 37-38 with n. 7; Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien*, 262-264.

[32] Some scholars of the present century have defended the view that Zoroaster lived in the time of Hystaspes the father of Darius. Well known examples are F. Altheim, *Zarathustra und Alexander*, Frankfurt am Main 1960, 37-52; E. Herzfeld, *Zoroaster and his World*, Princeton 1947.

[33] For references, cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, index. s.v. Vištāspa.

> *In ancient times they worshipped Zeus and Cronos and all the familiar gods acknowledged by pagans, except that they did not use the same names. They called Zeus Bel, say, and Heracles Sandes, and Aphrodite Anaitis, and the rest by other names, as is somewhere recorded by Berossus the Babylonian and Athenocles and Simacus, who wrote the ancient history of the Assyrians and Medes. But now they resemble in most respects the so-called Manichaeans, insofar as they hold that the first principles are two, one good, the source of all that is best in creation, the other the opposite in both respects. They give them barbarian names in their own language. The good spirit or creator they call Hormisdates, and Arimanes is the name of the bad, destructive one.*

The picture Agathias presents of the "original" religion to be found in the realms now under Persian dominion, is a strange and garbled collection of information on different peoples and different realms. As authorities on these matters or as his sources, he gives three authors: Berossus, famous throughout antiquity for the writing of his native Babylonian history, and two other authors, Athenocles and Simacus. As was said earlier, these authors are completely unknown.[34]

The picture of the non-Zoroastrian religion of the realm does not inspire much confidence. That the Persians worshipped Zeus, Kronos, Heracles and Aphrodite could still reflect the worship of Ahura Mazdā, Zurvān, Verethraghna and Anāhitā, but the identifications Agathias himself gives, show that this is not the case. In giving the indigenous names of the divinities, he first mentions an identification of Zeus with Bel, who was known to the Greeks as god of the Babylonians (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.181; 3.158) and other Semitic peoples, but not of the Persians. There are some traces of an identification of Bel with Ahura Mazdā,[35] and such an identification indeed seems natural, but it is much more likely that Agathias simply reproduces the identification of Babylonian Bel with Zeus common among the Greeks.

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[34] Cf. Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sasanians', 97.

[35] The best known example is an inscription from Arebsun (cf. *HZ* II, 274-275), which mentions Bel as the husband of the Mazdayasnian religion. Bel is here usually thought to be an *interpretatio semitica* of Ahura Mazdā.

The identification of Sandes with Heracles also belongs to the common stock of Greek information. The Luwian god Šanda (at times identified with Marduk) was known in antiquity as a divinity worshipped by the Cilicians in Tarsus and generally equated with Heracles.[36] He is, however, nowhere found in association with an Iranian divinity.

The third divinity mentioned by name is Anāhitā, who is of course Iranian. The equation of Anāhitā with Aphrodite points to Berossus as his source, because Berossus (and Herodotus *Histories* 1.131 in a mistaken way) is the only literary source to equate Anāhitā with Aphrodite.[37]

The picture of the religion before the reforms of Zoroaster thus gives the names of three divinities from three different peoples or geographical areas. Contrasted with this is the religion now prevalent in the Sasanian empire, which owes its existence to the teachings of Zoroaster. The contents of this new religion are described as resembling those of the Manichaeans. It would be more to the point to write that the contents of Manichaeism resemble those of the Persians, but the comparison is of course sound.

The resemblance between Zoroastrians and Manichaeans is sought in their recognition of two principles, one being wholly good and creator of good things, the other being wholly evil and creator of evil things (or destroyer of the good creation; both of these aspects of the evil god are only partially valid for Manichaeism). This is a fair summary of the best known fundamental tenet of Zoroastrianism, and similarly the names given by Agathias, Hormisdatēs for the good god and Arimanēs for the evil spirit, reflect Middle Persian forms of their names (Hormizd/Ohrmazd; Ahriman/Ahreman). The name of Ahura Mazdā as found in Agathias is unique; this offers some support to the idea that he depends on a Persian source (via Sergius). The writing of the name with a vowel -i- in the second syllable is confirmed by the Greek version of ŠKZ.[38]

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[36] Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sasanians', 96 (mentioning a.o. the important passage in Nonnus 34.192); and cf. W. Burkert, 'Oriental and Greek Mythology: The Meeting of Parallels' in: J. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, London 1987, 10-40, p. 17 (with refs.).

[37] In Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 5.65.3. I cannot share Cameron's reservations on this point, 'Agathias on the Sasanians', 96. Her reference to the article of M.-L. Chaumont, 'Le culte de la déesse Anāhitā (Anahit) dans la religion des monarques d'Iran et d'Arménie au Ier siècle de notre ère', *JA* 253 (1965), 167-181, p. 170, is scarcely convincing, because here as well it is clear that the identification of Anāhitā with Aphrodite is based on the same Berossus passage (and possibly Herodotus).

If, then, Agathias transmits information obtained via Sergius from Zoroastrian informants, this information confirms again the importance of dualism for Sasanian Zoroastrianism.[39] This is worth noticing because most Sasanian inscriptions do not reflect this importance of dualism at all. The names and epithets of the two spirits, bland as they may be, stress the primary functions of Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu, the first being creative (cf. Phl. *dādār*), the other destructive (Phl. *zadār*).

Their greatest festival is that called the "Removal of Evil," when they kill large numbers of serpents and other wild and desert-living creatures and bring them to the Magi as though as a sign of piety. In this way, they believe that they are doing what pleases the good spirit, while vexing and offending Arimanes. They honour water greatly, to the extent that they neither wash their faces in it nor touch it in any other way except for drinking and the nurture of crops.

The festival Agathias mentions, in which a great number of evil creatures are killed, is also alluded to by some other sources, but not under the name Agathias gives it. The custom of killing insects, reptiles and other harmful creatures belongs to the elements of Zoroastrian daily life noticed often by travellers in premodern times.[40] In Greek literature, the custom is also sometimes described; it is mentioned by Herodotus (1.140), Plutarch (*De Iside* 46, *De Invidia et Odio* 3.537B, *Quaestiones Conviviales* IV.670D) and possibly also by Pseudo-Aristotle (*Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* 27).[41]

The Iranian texts remain silent on the existence of a festival as mentioned by Agathias, but there is some confirmation from contemporary sources, suggesting the importance of *xarastar-košī*, "killing of the *xrafstras*," at a festival for Spendārmad, the guardian of the earth, among the Zoroastrians of Kerman.[42] That Zoroastrians believed that they would please Ohrmazd and hurt Ahreman by killing evil creatures is of course precisely the point of the festival.

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[38] Cf. Back, *Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, 194-195, for a discussion.

[39] As treated, for instance, in Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 5-26.

[40] Firby, *European Travellers*, 70-71 (and cf. index s.v. 'khrafstra').

[41] For these texts, cf. ch. 4.4.3.

[42] *HZ* I, 299, n. 26; Boyce, *Stronghold*, 202.

The great reverence the Zoroastrians have for water can be found in most references to Iranian religiosity and is confirmed by the many discussions of avoiding pollution of water in the Pahlavi texts.[43] Contrary to what Agathias has to say, Persians do in fact wash themselves with water, they only do not do so in sources of water, but in water taken from a stream in a separate bowl. This is sufficiently alien to Greek customs that it must have attracted some attention.

They have names for and worship many other gods too. [That is pagan] They practise sacrifice and purification and divination. [That is also pagan] Fire they hold to be worthy of reverence and very holy, and for this reason the Magi keep it unquenched in certain holy buildings, set apart, and look toward it while performing their secret rites and inquiring about the future. This practice they derived I believe from the Chaldaeans or from some other people, for it does not accord with the rest. In this way it seems that their faith, to which so many different peoples have contributed, has become very complicated. This seems very understandable. I do not know of any other state which has assumed so many forms and shapes, not able to remain for long in the same form but suffering the domination of countless different peoples at different times. So it is very natural that it should preserve the signs of so many types and customs.

This passage, the beginning of 2.25, is enlarged by the addition "and this is pagan" (τοῦτο Ἑλληνικόν) after the first two customs described. There is considerable uncertainty about the question whether these words should be included in the edition, or whether they must be left out.[44] Since Agathias' main interest in this passage is a description of the hybrid nature of current Persian religiosity, the insertion appears natural, whatever the authorship.

That the Persians have many other gods is correct and little more can be said about it. The same is true for the importance of sacrifice, purification and divination in their religion, although the latter category does not appear in "standard" texts on priestly duties.

Agathias' description of the attitude towards fire is somewhat more interesting. As Cameron notices, Agathias probably was influenced in his description of fire cult by his predecessor Procopius, who also paid attention to fire-temples (*De Bello Persico* 2.24.2), stressing the same aspects of worship and divination.[45] That they would have learnt to do this from the Chaldaeans is unlikely, and probably reflects the difficulties later authors had in distinguishing between Magi, quacks and Chaldaeans. The description of Zoroastrianism as one of the most hybrid religious traditions of the ancient world reflects Agathias' curious ideas on the history of regional powers more than any sort of religious-historical awareness.

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[43] For instance *PhlRivAdFb* 37-45.

[44] Of the two modern editions of Agathias, S. Costanza (*Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque*, Messina 1969) has retained the words, whereas R. Keydell (*Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque*, Berlin 1967) has bracketed them.

4. *Evaluation*

Agathias' description of the beliefs and customs of the Persians is the longest extant passage on the subject. Agathias had unique opportunities to learn about Persian affairs. Not only could he discuss Persian culture with his friend Sergius, he also had access to Iranian materials through this same connection. We can see the result of such possibilities in his description of the Persian funerary customs. Agathias was overtly disgusted by these, but his description of these customs is the most detailed information on Persian funerary traditions in a non-Iranian source. The remainder of Agathias' description of the Persian religion is an accumulated transcript of popular Greek notions on this religion and its practitioners, which has little value for the history of Zoroastrianism, but is of great importance for the reconstruction of popular images of Zoroastrianism in late antiquity.

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[45] Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sasanians', 99.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEMATIC INVENTORY OF THE GREEK AND LATIN TEXTS

1. *The Pantheon*

1.1 *Ahura Mazdā*

a) *Ahura Mazdā* = ’Ωϱομάζης

Ahura Mazdā, “the Wise Lord”, is the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism. He is mentioned in almost every line of the Avesta, invoked over and over again in the OP inscriptions, and omnipresent in Pahlavi literature. He was known to the Greeks under different names. Some authors knew him by name and have transmitted his name in a variety of Greek transcriptions. The two most common Greek forms for his name, ’Ωϱομάζης and ’Ωϱομάσδης,[1] both render the OP form *Auramazda*,[2] whereas the other forms of his name, ’Oϱ(α)μάσδης, ’Oϱμισδάτης and ’Oϱμίσδας probably render the MP form of his name *Ohrmazd* (*Hormizd*). In Greek epigraphy (only from Commagene), he is called Ζεὺς ’Ωϱομάσδης.

The earliest occurrence of Ahura Mazdā’s name in Greek literature is found in the pseudo-Platonic *Greater Alcibiades* 1.122A. There the education of children among the Persians is said to entail the teaching of “the Magic of Zoroaster, the son of Ōromazēs” (μαγείαν ... τὴν Ζωϱοάστϱου τοῦ ‘Ωϱομάζου). The tradition that Zoroaster was the son of Ahura Mazdā is only repeated by Agathias, *Historiae* 2.24, and appears to owe little to Iranian speculations. Bidez and Cumont suggested that Zarathustra was presented as the "spiritual son" or disciple of Ahura Mazdā,[3] which—even if intended—would probably not have been understood by the Greek audience of Pseudo-Plato and remains doubtful. Any knowledge of the intimate links between Ahura Mazdā and Zarathustra, the meetings Zarathustra holds with Ahura Mazdā, the fact that Ahura Mazdā reveals the religion to Zarathustra, may have been responsible for Pseudo-Plato's interpretation of their relationship. This is, of course, wholly unconnected with Iranian ideas, for in Iran—contrary to Greece—divinities do not have mortal offspring.

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[1] To which the corrupt form ’Ωϱομάγδης, Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 11.25 (dependent on Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 41), may be added.

[2] Cf. Moulton, *EZ*, 422-424; the OIr diphthong /au/ is regularly rendered as Gk ω, as—for instance—in ’Αϱτοζώστϱη < *r̥ta-zauštrī-; ’Ωχος < *va(h)uka- etc. For this aspect of the name, cf. particularly R. Schmitt, ‘Bakchylides’ ἁβϱοβάτας und die Iranier-Namen mit Anlaut *ABRA/O-*’, *Glotta* 53 (1975), 207-216, p. 209, and *id.*, ‘Griechisch oder iranisch? Zum Namen eines milesischen Münzbeamten’, in: P. Vavroušek (ed.), *Iranian and Indo-European Studies. Memorial Volume of Otakar Klíma*, Praha 1994, 229-238, p. 235.

Apart from the repetition of the idea in Agathias, there is one other source which shows a *Nachleben* of the greater Alcibiades in this respect. The passage from Pseudo-Plato is extensively quoted and used in the *Apology* of Apuleius, ch. 26. Apuleius, however, does not refer to Oromazes as the father of Zoroaster, but calls both Zoroaster and Oromazes the *auctores* of magic, the Persian worship of the gods.[4] The mysterious passage in Pliny, *Natural History* 30.44, where he quotes Hermippus to the effect that Zoroaster was taught his art by a certain "Agonaces" or "Azonaces", was interpreted by some as containing a similar tradition. Moulton, for instance, considered the name to be a corrupt form of Ahura Mazdā.[5] It is difficult to see how such a corruption could have taken place. The name as transmitted has an Iranian ring to it and Pliny (or Hermippus) seems to refer to a teacher of Zoroaster. If this had been based on the formulation of the Greater Alcibiades, it is likely that the name of Ahura Mazdā would have been preserved. If, however, this is an independent tradition, the name can derive from a variety of backgrounds, not even necessarily Iranian.[6] In the passage immediately following Pliny mentions several other names of ancient sages, two of which are claimed to be Median (*Apusorus* and *Zaratus*), but none of which can be sufficiently explained. It seems best, therefore, to regard the passage as independent from the Greater Alcibiades and transmitting an otherwise unknown story of Zoroaster's teacher.

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[3] *Mages* I, 24; II, 22, n. 2.

[4] For the *Apology* of Apuleius and this passage, cf. A. Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura und die antike Zauberei* (RGVV 4.2), Giessen 1908 (repr. Berlin 1967), 32-36; T. Alimonti, 'La vita e la magia', in A. Pennacini *et al.*, *Apuleio letterato, filosofo, mago*, Bologna 1979 (1984²), 113-165 (with bibliography).

[5] Moulton, *EZ*, 424, n. 1. For different interpretations, cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 12, n. 6.

[6] I know of only one named teacher of Zoroaster in the Iranian tradition: the sage *Borzīn-Korūs* is said to have educated Zarathustra in *ZN* 351-356.

Ahura Mazdā is most often mentioned by name in passages describing Persian dualism. The earliest possible reference may have been Aristotle's *On Philosophy* (Diogenes Laertius 1.8). Diogenes lists as other authorities who have written similar things Hermippus, Eudoxus and Theopompus, but the works in which these authors have written on Persian dualism are all lost. It appears likely, however, that Plutarch has used one or more of these sources (he indeed mentions Theopompus explicitly as a source for some of his views) in his description of Zoroastrian dualism.[7]

At various places in his many works, Plutarch has preserved references to Ahura Mazdā, both in explaining Persian dualism, and in the creation of Oriental atmosphere in his *Lives*. The most important passage on dualism is *De Iside et Osiride* 46-47 (cf. ch. 3.3). Plutarch ascribes the following qualities to Ahura Mazdā: he is good, and the creator of good things. The good creations (good plants, good animals) belong to him. He is associated with light and creator of the good gods and the entire creation before the assault of the evil spirit. All these aspects have been discussed in detail in ch. 3.3, where the overall accuracy of the information Plutarch gives is demonstrated. Plutarch also mentions Ahura Mazdā in *De Animae Procreatione* 27.1026B in the context of dualism, but offers no additional information on his nature or character. The names of Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu there appear in a list of dualist positions of great thinkers. The interesting part of this passage is the canonical list in which Zoroaster's name appears: Empedocles, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Zoroaster. In this list of varieties of dualism, Zoroaster is said to have taught the opposition between a "god" and a "demon." He called Oromasdes "god" and Areimanios "demon." The same information can also be found in *De Iside* and it undoubtedly is an attempt to render the distinction *yazata—daēva*.

A similar dualist frame underlies the passage in Agathias, *Historiae* 2.24, discussed in chapter 3.5. Agathias agrees with

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[7] Theopompus in Plutarch, *De Iside* 47, referred to Angra Mainyu as Hades. Diogenes (1.8) indeed gives the name of the Evil Spirit both in its Graeco-Iranian form *Areimanios* and in its Greek interpretation Hades.

Diogenes Laertius's sources in calling the two spirits *archai*, thus stressing the uncreated, original, nature of both beings. The good god, called *Hormisdatēs*, is good and the god who has brought forth everything that is good in the cosmos. Agathias is the only Greek source to call Ahura Mazdā the δημιουϱγός, "creator," which accords very well with Ahura Mazdā's nature, and may reflect the common Sasanian appellation of Ohrmazd as *dādār*, "creator".[8]

Ahura Mazdā's name is also mentioned in some passages that are frequently connected with Zurvanism: Damascius, *De Principiis* 125.2 (I.322 Ruelle) and Theodorus of Mopsuestia's *On the Magian Religion in Persia* in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 72.81. Damascius mentions Eudemus of Rhodes as his source; his information may therefore be from the fourth century BCE.[9] Having described the recognition of a first principle by the Persians, called Place or Time, from which the good and evil spirits are separated, he gives the name of the good god as Ὡϱομάσδης. The good and the evil spirit are described as leaders of the "double series of higher beings," thus presenting Ahura Mazdā as overlord of the lesser good divinities and Angra Mainyu as overlord of the lesser evil beings. This belongs, of course, to the standard doctrine. As we shall see (in ch. 4.4.2), it is questionable whether this passage is Zurvanite.

In the *Library* of Photius, a summary of Theodorus of Mopsuestia's *On the Magian Religion in Persia*, a work originally in three books, of which only the first book dealt with the Persian religion, has been preserved. From the summary of the first book, Photius mentions a doctrine—attributed to Zarades—of Zourouam, who made offerings to bring forth Hormisdas, and accidentally also conceived of Satan. The book also paid attention to the question of incest (αἱμομιξία)[10] among the Persians. The information Theodorus offers is unique in Greek, but bears a striking resemblance to similar Zurvanite myths preserved in Armenian and Syriac.[11] Some scholars therefore suggested that the Armenian and Syriac accounts all derive from Theodorus; others have suggested more intricate lines of transmission, all, however, including Theodorus.[12] Since Theodorus' bishopric was in Cilicia, close to the Syrian cultural world as well as to Commagene and Armenia Minor, his knowledge of Zurvanism and the precise information offered by the Armenian and Syriac texts indeed strongly suggests a prevalence of Zurvanite theogonical ideas among the Magi of these parts of the world.

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[8] As in the formula *pad nām ī dādār*, "in name of the Creator," with which virtually every Pahlavi text begins. For the formula, cf. Ph. Gignoux, 'Pour une origine iranienne du bi'smillah', in: Ph. Gignoux et al., *Pad nām ī yazdān. Études d'épigraphie, de numismatique et d'histoire de l'Iran ancien*, Paris 1979, 159-163.

[9] Cf. G. Gnoli, 'A Note on the Magi and Eudemus of Rhodes', in: *A Green Leaf. Papers in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen* (AI 28), Leiden 1988, 283-288.

[10] For the meaning of the word (guessed at by Boyce and Grenet, *HZ* III, 307), cf. Johannes Jejunator's *Poenitentiale* (*PG* 88, 1893D). It appears to have been a common Byzantine word for "incest"; cf. E.A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Cambridge MA 1914, s.v.

A connection which is sometimes made when Ahura Mazdā is mentioned, is that with truth and justice. Particularly, but not exclusively in the context of the education of Persian youths (a popular subject among certain Greek authors, to be discussed in ch. 4.8.4) stress is placed upon truth, justice and related concepts. The earliest relevant passage is again the *Greater Alcibiades*, but the subject is particularly clear in Porphyrius, *Life of Pythagoras* 41. In explaining some *akousmata* of Pythagoras, Porphyrius includes speaking the truth.[13] "These are the things he taught; but above all to speak the truth. For only this can make humans approximately similar to God. For, as he learnt from the Magi, god himself, whom they call Oromazes, resembles light with regard to his body and truth with regard to his soul." This interpretation of what Pythagoras learnt from the Magi can also be found in Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 11.33: "When Pythagoras was asked what makes humans similar to the gods, he said: 'If they speak the truth.' And the Magi reveal of the greatest of the gods, whom they call Oromagdēs, that he resembles light with regard to his body, truth with regard to his soul."

The details of this reasoning concerning Ahura Mazdā—

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[11] The most important Armenian and Syriac sources, Ełišē Vardapet, Eznik of Kołb, Theodore bar Kōnay and Yoḥannān bar Penkayē, can be conveniently consulted in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419-429.

[12] For an overview of suggestions, cf. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419-421 with references; against Theodorus as source for the Armenian and Syriac accounts, cf. L. van Rompay, 'Eznik de Kołb et Théodore de Mopsueste. A propos d'une hypothèse de Louis Mariès', *OLP* 15 (1984), 159-175. Cf. also *HZ* III, 307, where it is rightly assumed, that there need not be a literary tradition, but that the information in the various authors may have been obtained from the living faith.

[13] For the *akousmata*, cf. W. Burkert, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft. Studien zu Pythagoras, Philolaos und Platon*, Nürnberg 1962, 150-175; for the imagined encounter between Pythagoras and Zoroaster, cf. especially Kingsley, 'Greek Origin', with abundant references.

though certainly having an Iranian flavour—are difficult to pinpoint precisely in Iranian texts. As in the case of Plutarch, *De Iside* 46, a connection between Ahura Mazdā and light is obvious, as is that between Ahura Mazdā and truth. The distinction between Ahura Mazdā's body and his soul, however, is not only virtually impossible to translate into Iranian, but also fits Greek philosophical discussions much better than Iranian speculations.

The divinities are regularly described in the Avesta as having a body (Av. *kəhrp-*) that is worthy of being worshipped (Yt. 11.21-22).[14] In Pahlavi literature, the body or "form" (*kirb*) of Ohrmazd and the other divinities is also mentioned; in the evolved theology these texts represent, however, Ohrmazd is mostly said to be "a spiritual being among the spiritual beings" (*andar mēnōgān mēnōg*).[15] Since Ohrmazd's essence is said to be light (eternal light or physical light) as well as righteousness (*WZ* 22.5), similar views may underlie the distinction between his body (that which can be apprehended: light) and his soul (that which can be experienced: righteousness), explained to a Greek audience or rephrased in acceptable Greek ideas.

The mention of Ahura Mazdā in court contexts, to be found in Plutarch's *Lives*, poses no specific problems, but also adds little information. In *Ad Principem Ineruditum* 3.780C, Plutarch tells that the Persian king had a servant, whose duty it was to go to the king at dawn and say to him: "Arise, o king, and ponder upon the matters great Oromasdēs (Mesoromasdēs) wanted you to consider."

This passage contains a *crux*. The manuscripts read μεσοϱομάσδης, which was emended in most editions to μέγας Ὠϱομάσδης. Some Iranianists, however, have followed Wikander in interpreting μεσοϱομάσδης as the rendering of a dvandva-compound **Miça-Auramazdā*, "Mithra and Ahura Mazdā", with the expected OP form of the name of Mithra, **Miça*.[16] I must confess my doubts. Plutarch elsewhere also uses the words μέγας Ὠϱομάσδης in a very similar context (*Artaxerxes* 29), without any support for an alternative reading.[17] The actual existence of dvandva-compounds in OP, moreover, is still in need of demonstration. The only possible example, El. *mi-(iš-)šá-a-ba-qa*, is interpreted in four different ways, the least likely of which makes it a dvandva-compound, Mithra and the Baga.[18] The rendering of OP /i/ as Gk ε is very badly attested, and an emendation to **misoromasdēs* would seem necessary. The second syllable, moreover, would have been long, which is not rendered in Greek either. If a dvandva-compound underlies the name, therefore, it must have been reinterpreted in Greek transmission on the basis of Gk *mesos* or related words. Even if the interpretation of the word as a dvandva-compound is accepted, there is very little reason to draw firm conclusions from this name.[19]

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[14] For some texts concerning the body of Ahura Mazdā, cf. Widengren, *Hochgottglaube*, 235-238.

[15] Cf. Shaked, 'Notions *mēnōg* and *gētīg*', 78.

[16] This form has been attested in Elamite and Aramaic transcription. Cf. *On.Pers*. 8.321; 8.449; 8.589 etc.; W. Eilers, 'Neue aramäische Urkunden aus Ägypten', *AfO* 17 (1954-56), 322-335, p. 332 (Aram. *Mspt* = **Miça-pāta-*). For the form in Plutarch, cf. S. Wikander, 'Mithra en vieux-perse', *Or.Suec*. 1 (1952), 66-68.

Finally, there remains to be considered the information from Plutarch's *De Iside* 47, that Ahura Mazdā enlarged himself three times and withdrew from the sun as far as the sun is removed from the earth. This is often connected with the idea of the threefold heaven, commonly encountered in Zoroastrian texts. Ahura Mazdā's realm is located beyond these three heavens.[20] This interpretation is partly unsatisfactory, because these texts never refer to an original smaller cosmos, which was subsequently enlarged, as appears to be implied by Plutarch. In Plethon's commentary on the *Oracula Chaldaica* this passage is extensively commented upon. Plethon rephrases Plutarch in a different way, by stressing the fact that according to Plutarch Zoroaster makes a triple division of being, calling the first part

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[17] And elsewhere, he mentions "the Lord Oromasdes" (ὁ κύριος ᾿Ωρομάσδης; *Alexander* 30), in which case "lord" may render OP *baga-* (MP *bay*). If that is so, the appellation "great Oromasdes" would be even more likely, in view of the frequent OP appellation of Ahura Mazdā as *vazraka-*, "great."

[18] The interpretations are: Koch, *Religiösen Verhältnisse* 87-90: OP *visai baga*, "all gods"; Gershevitch (in Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 19, n. 11) OP **miça baga*, "the god Mithra"; Sims-Williams, 'Mithra the Baga', 180, n. 18 (tentatively) **miça haya baga* "Mithra who is the Baga". The interpretation as a dvandva-compound (also upheld for OP *miθra baga*, A^{3}P 25), was suggested by Boyce, *HZ* II, 139; 283.

[19] In Middle Persian, as is stressed in *HZ* I, 49 with n. 176, the personal name *Mihr-Ohrmazd* has been attested (for references, cf. K. Yamauchi, *The Vocabulary of Sasanian Seals*, Tokyo 1993, 28). This, however, does not support the reconstruction of the OP compound; MP names are very regularly composed of two (or even three) divine names which do not point to as many dvandva-compounds (e.g. *Tīr-Ohrmazd*; *Rām-Mihr*; *Ard-Ohrmazd* etc.).

[20] Panaino, 'Uranographia Iranica I', in: Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 205-225.

Oromazes (corresponding to the Father in the *Oracula Chaldaica*), the last part Arimanes and the intermediary part Mithras (corresponding to Nous in the *Oracula Chaldaica*). He applies this scheme also to the tripling of Ahura Mazdā: Ahura Mazdā being the First, withdraws three times from the Sun, Mithra twice. On the basis of similar ideas in Plato, Plethon interprets the three aspects of being as "eternal" (Ahura Mazdā), "temporal but infinite" (Mithra), and "mortal" (Arimanes). This also undoubtedly corresponds to localisations, where Arimanes would be seen as being confined to the sublunar realm, Mithra to the intermediate realm and Oromazes to the hypercosmic realm.[21]

It is difficult to retrieve Iranian information from these passages in Plutarch and Plethon. It is most likely, in fact, that the entire application of the text by Plethon merely refers to Neo-Platonic ideas with Iranian names. This is less certain for the passage in De Iside. There are Iranian correspondences for the idea that Ahura Mazdā resides on high, that Angra Mainyu resides in the depths and that Mithra has an intermediary position (as in *De Iside 46*). One could at least suspect these ideas behind the tripling of Oromazes and the projection of Oromazes' place to a region as far removed from the sun as the sun is removed from the earth. Plutarch's passage can also be connected with Iranian cosmogonies which consider the original creation to have been small and confined, and to have been released from that state by a divine act of liberation. This, however, is not compatible with the mainstream Zoroastrian cosmogony, which stresses on the contrary that the original creation was wide, spacious and light. Given the mass of Platonic parallels to Plethon's interpretation of Plutarch, and the evidence in De Iside 46, that Plutarch offers an *interpretatio platonica* of Iranian doctrine, we also have to suspect that the Platonic idea of the highest eternal deity residing beyond heaven contributed to Plutarch's mysterious Iranian mythologem. All this has been discussed in greater detail in ch. 3.3.3.

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[21] Cf. for these notions, D. Ulansey, 'Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun', in: Hinnells (ed.), *Studies in Mithraism*, 257-264. The application of this theorem on the Mithraic mysteries, as suggested by Ulansey, is far from satisfactory. For Plethon, cf. C.M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon. Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford 1986, 48-61.

b) Ahura Mazdā = Zeus

The identification of Ahura Mazdā with Zeus is more frequently encountered in Greek literature than the Iranian name of the divinity. It is commonly accepted that it is always Ahura Mazdā who is to be understood when Greek authors mention Zeus among the Persians. It seems fair, however, to question the validity of seeing Ahura Mazdā in every passage in Greek literature where a "Persian" Zeus is mentioned. It is more likely that many authors simply projected Greek Zeus into a Persian context, without inquiring after the existence of a comparable divinity among the Persians. An early example of this is Aeschylus' *Persians*, where, for instance (739-740), the ghost of the deceased Darius says: "Alas! Swiftly the prophecy became reality, Zeus hurled down on my son the completion of the divine ordainments." It may be true that the genre of the writing influences the reliability of the interpretation, but sometimes identifications are too rashly judged to require a basis in Iranian reality.[22]

This is also the case with some of the epithets given to Iranian Zeus. The most important of these epithets are "ancestral" (πατρῷος), "the King" (Βασιλεύς), and "the greatest" (μέγιστος). These occur in various different passages and contexts; epithets such as Διαβατηριός ("connected with the fording of a stream") and Στράτιος ("of the army") have a more specific background.

Ancestral Zeus, Ζεὺς Πατρῷος, is mentioned by Xenophon and Plutarch.[23] Both authors mention the divinity exclusively in royal contexts, presenting the king of the Persians either as sacrificing to this divinity, or as invoking or imploring him. Πατρῷος as a local epithet for Greek Zeus is attested in Greek literary and epigraphical texts. A fragment from Aeschylus' *Niobe* mentions his altar on the Ida,[24] Plato uses the epithet when quoting this fragment, and on some other occasions.[25] The use of the epithet has been connected with the quality of Zeus as guardian of the ancestral laws.[26] This suits the practices of Greek authors well: it would explain the use of an epithet unknown from Iranian texts, which presents Zeus-Ahura Mazdā as the sovereign over the *Persian* ancestral laws, as the god of the Persians.

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[22] As is clear, for instance, from W. Nagel & B. Jacobs, 'Königsgötter und Sonnengottheit bei altiranischen Dynastien', *IrAnt* 24 (1989), 337-389. As a collection of sources this article is valuable, but it remains very unclear what the intention of the authors was in bringing together the sources.

[23] Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.6.1; 3.3.22; 7.1.1; 8.7.3; Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander* 2.6.338F. For some of the underlying structures of the Persian Zeus in Xenophon, cf. C. Tuplin, 'Persian Decor in *Cyropaedia*: Some Observations', *AchHist* 5 (1990), 17-29.

[24] Aeschylus, *Niobe* frg. 155 (Dindorff); cf. Plato, *Republic* 3.391E; Strabo, *Geography*, 12.8.21.

[25] E.g. *Laws* 9.881D.

Zeus the King, Ζεὺς Βασιλεύς, occurs in Xenophon and in Arrian.[27] Chronologically, the only interesting passages are those from Xenophon, because Arrian may well have used Xenophon in his attempts to create a Persian atmosphere. In Xenophon's work, Zeus King is mentioned in a context of royal sacrifice, upon the witnessing of an omen, or of sacrifices advised by the Magi.

The epithet "king" for Greek Zeus is absent from Homer. A comparable epithet for Ahura Mazdā is equally absent from early Iranian texts.[28] A detailed survey concerning the epigraphical attestations of words connected with divine sovereignty and human subservience, has shown that titles such as "king", "ruler", "lord" for Greek divinities arose only quite late in Greek religion, presumably under the influence of similar appellations in Anatolian cults.[29] Xenophon thus provides early examples of this usage in Greek, again to specify an Oriental, in this case Iranian, divinity. Apart from stressing the elevated status of Ahura Mazdā as the greatest of the gods among the Iranians no further etymological or historical connection between Xenophon's appellation and Iranian religious terminology seems possible.

The same appears to be true for the otherwise astonishing passwords Xenophon describes among the Persian soldiers of Cyrus: *Zeus our Ally and our Guide* and *Zeus our Saviour and our Guide*.[30] The idea of "allied" (σύμμαχος) gods occurs more often in Xenophon when the Persians are mentioned.[31] Gods who are allies and guides, who direct armies, who save the army from the assaults of others, can all be found in the Avestan Yašts. Mithra and Verethraghna, for instance, are firmly on the side of those who uphold righteousness, who make offerings to these gods in the proper way. Gods who act against the enemies of the righteous are reminiscent of the interpretations of the Persian gods in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. In the OP inscriptions, this type of religiosity focuses entirely on Ahura Mazdā, who protects the Achaemenian dynasts among other things from the hostile army.[32] We can again postulate a link in content between Xenophon's "Zeus our Ally and our Guide" and the OP implorations of Ahura Mazdā's protection (*mām auramazdā pātu*, "may Ahura Mazdā protect me"), but a congruence of expressions or words beyond this level appears unlikely.

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[26] Cf. the entry πατρῷος in *ThWNT* 5, 1016-1017.

[27] Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 2.4.19; 3.3.21; 7.5.57; Arrian 4.20.3; and cf. A.B. Bosworth, *A Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander*, vol. 2, Oxford 1995, 134.

[28] For some suggestions on this subject, cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 34.

[29] H.W. Pleket, 'Religious History as the History of Mentality: The 'Believer' as Servant of the Deity in the Greek World', in: H.S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, Hope and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (SGRR 2), Leiden 1981, 152-192.

[30] *Cyropaedia* 3.3.58: Ζεὺς σύμμαχος καὶ ἡγεμών; 7.1.10: Ζεὺς σωτὴρ καὶ ἡγεμών.

[31] E.g. *Cyropaedia* 7.1.1; 7.5.22.

The only case in which Greek and OP epithets correspond *verbatim*, is the (rare) appellation "greatest Zeus" (Ζεὺς μέγιστος), also found in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*.[33] There is an evident parallel with the OP appellation of Ahura Mazdā as *maθišta bagānām*,[34] "the greatest of the gods," a usage not found in early Indo-European appellations of divinities. For this usage, however, ancient Near Eastern parallels are easy to find.[35] Similarly, the epithets "great" and "lord" for Oromasdes have been attested (Plutarch, *Alexander* 30: ὁ ϰύϱιος Ὠϱομάσδης; *Artaxerxes* 29: ὁ μέγας Ὠϱομάζης), recalling the OP appellations *baga-* ("lord," cf. MP *bay*) and *vazraka-* ("great").

The epithet Στϱάτιος, "of the army," is only mentioned by Appian.[36] Zeus Stratios is known as an ancient Carian divinity, worshipped in Labraunda; his cult gained popularity in Pontus and other parts of Anatolia as well.[37] Since Appian records "ancestral" sacrifices performed by Mithridates to Zeus Stratios, "as they are performed in Pasargadae," it is widely assumed that this

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[32] DPd 16-24, on which, cf. J. Kellens. 'Trois réflexions sur la religion des Achéménides', *SII* 2 (1976), 113-132.

[33] 5.1.29; 6.4.9.

[34] AsH 6-7; DPd 1-2, etc.

[35] In the Avesta, the equivalent of OP *maθišta bagānām* is absent, as it is from Vedic or early Greek literature. For the appellation "great" or "greatest" in Greek, cf. Versnel, *Inconsistencies* I, 194-196, with references. For ancient Near Eastern parallels of the "incomparability" and greatness of various gods, cf. C. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Pretoria Oriental Series 5), Leiden 1966.

[36] *Mithridateia* 66; 70.

[37] F. Cumont, 'Le Zeus Stratios de Mithridate', *RHR* 43 (1901), 47-57; *HZ* III, 293-301; McGing, *Foreign Policy*, 10, n. 37.

Zeus Stratios is in fact Ahura Mazdā. However likely this may seem, the fact that his epithet obviously derives from the Anatolian god suggests that Mithridates in fact worshipped a local divinity with an Iranian sacrifice, as Persian kings are said to have done by Herodotus. It seems unwise, therefore, to attribute every mention of Zeus Stratios (or Jupiter Στρατιος)[38] to an "original" worship of Ahura Mazdā.[39]

The epithet Διαβατηριός ("connected with the fording of a stream") for Zeus occurs only once: Ctesias in Photius, *Library*, 72.38b (p. 114 Henry). Ctesias mentions a sanctuary erected by Darius after he had forded a river. The sanctuary was destroyed by the Scythians. The offering of sacrifices connected with the fording of a river is a well-known Greek custom.[40] It is not known as an institutionalised Iranian practice. It seems fair to assume that Ctesias—at least in according the epithet to Zeus—attributed elements of Greek religiosity to Darius.

There are many passages which describe the custom of a chariot devoted to Zeus leading a procession. Invariably, this chariot is described as being empty;[41] sometimes chariots devoted to other divinities are also mentioned. The practice of devoting a chariot to a divinity, who was invited to take place in it, is well known from the ancient Near East.[42] The fact that the chariot for Persian Zeus was empty—as opposed, for instance, to the chariot of Aššur among the Babylonians, in which the statue of this god was transported—shows the aniconic nature of the Iranian religion, particularly in connection with Ahura Mazdā.

Xenophon twice mentions a connection between Persian Zeus and lightning and thunder.[43] In both cases, these phenomena are interpreted by the Persians as good omens. A Persian background to the passage is not entirely inconceivable, but highly unlikely. One sort of lightning (Phl. *rōzag*) is seen as beneficent;

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[38] Pliny, *Natural History* 16.239 (accidentally 339 in *HZ* III, 298, n. 207).

[39] *Pace* Boyce and Grenet, *HZ* III, 298-300. Their assumption appears to be, that divinities can only be worshipped within the totality of the religious system. Although they do mention the fact that Mithridates brought Greek offerings to Greek gods (as is clear from *InsDelos* 1560, cf. *HZ* III, 298, n. 202), the idea of Iranian-style offerings to non-Iranian gods, appears to be impossible in their interpretation.

[40] Cf. LSJ, s.v. διαβατήρια.

[41] Herodotus, *Histories* 7.40; 8.115. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 8.3.11-12. Q. Curtius Rufus 3.3.11.

[42] *HZ* II, 36.

[43] *Cyropaedia* 1.6.1; 7.1.3.

it helps to destroy the demon Spenjaghriya (Vd. 19.40);[44] the lightning that strikes down on earth (Phl. *wīrōzag*), is evil; it strikes down beneficent animals and righteous men.[45] Thunder is a *daevic* noise; Cyrus' reaction upon hearing thunder ("Greatest Zeus, we shall follow you!"; *Cyropaedia* 7.1.3) is therefore at the very least atypical for an Iranian; since Greek Zeus is the god of lightning, Cyrus here, as so often in the *Cyropaedia*, shows Greek rather than Iranian behaviour.

The mention of Zeus in a context of sacrifices and the taking of oaths is most often part of the depiction of the behaviour of the king or of general descriptions of Persian customs.[46] The Persians indeed offer sacrifices to Ahura Mazdā. The animals which are sacrificed to Zeus are rarely specified. Xenophon explicitly refers to bulls being sacrificed to Zeus (and horses to the Sun), which seems wholly plausible.

Herodotus writes (*Histories* 1.131) that the Persians call by the name of Zeus the entire vault of heaven (cf. ch. 3.1.3). This tradition has had a certain influence in Greek literature and can for instance be found in the discussion between Celsus and Origen (*Contra Celsum* 5.44). Herodotus' text also undoubtedly was the basis for the appearance of the word Δῖαν in Hesychius' *Lexicon*, which is glossed as the Persian word for heaven.[47] Herodotus' information is incorrect, or at least not capable of corroboration. We can do no better than refer to Burkert's convincing interpretation of the passage, in which he stresses the *reconstruction* inherent in Herodotus' interpretation and the influence of Xenophanes' critique of traditional Greek conceptions of divinities.[48]

1.2 *The Amesha Spentas*[49]

In Zoroastrian theology, the seven Amesha Spentas (Av. *aməša-spənta-*, "beneficent immortal") occupy a prominent place. Although there has been a debate on the antiquity of the Amesha Spentas as a fixed collective (that is, on the fixed number of the Heptad and the standard individual deities of the Heptad),[50] their importance in Zoroastrian doctrine—as the guardians of the seven elements of creation—can hardly be overestimated. The Amesha Spentas are said to be the first creations of Ahura Mazdā (who himself is most often described as part of the heptad), they embody and guard the seven elements of creation and reflect the seven cardinal virtues. Most of them have a certain individuality with the exception of Haurvatāt and Ameretāt, who usually act as a couple.

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[44] Gray, *Foundations*, 214.

[45] *PhlRDd*. 35a1-6.

[46] Sacrifice: Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.3.11; 8.3.24 etc.; Strabo, *Geography*, 15.3.13; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.44.611 (from Herodotus); most of the passages mentioning Zeus Patrōos, Zeus Basileus, Zeus Stratios. Oaths: Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.3.6; 1.3.10; 1.3.11 etc.

[47] Cf. Chr. Bartholomae, *Zum altiranischen Wörterbuch. Nacharbeiten und Vorarbeiten* (IF Beih. 19), Strassburg 1906, 172-175; and cf. ch. 3.1.3.

[48] Burkert, 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', 42.

[49] For overviews and introductions, cf. Lommel, *Religion Zarathustras*, 30-73; *HZ* I, 192-228; Gray, *Foundations*, 16-55; J. Narten, *Die Aməṣ̌a Spəṇtas im Awesta*,

There is a surprising contrast between the prominence of the Amesha Spentas in Zoroastrian literature and the almost total silence on these beings in all foreign sources on the religion of the Persians, Greek and Latin as well as Syriac or Armenian. As a group, they are only mentioned once in Armenian literature.[51] In Syriac, the heptad does not occur at all. In Greek, there is only one reference to all Amesha Spentas: Plutarch, *De Iside* 47 (cf. ch. 3.3). In his version of the Persian cosmogony, he relates that the first creative act by Ahura Mazdā was the creation of six divinities. These divinities are the gods of good will, truth, good government, wisdom, riches and "the artificer of the pleasures in recompense for virtue."[52] Of these six names, the first four are transparent; they refer to Vohu Manah (Good thought), Aša (Righteousness), Khšathra Vairya (Desirable Dominion) and Ārmaiti (Devotion); the latter two must refer to Haurvatāt (Wholeness) and Ameretāt (Immortality), but the correspondences are less than exact compared to the earlier four. Plutarch's evidence is of exceptional importance in showing that it was possible for Greeks to learn of the doctrine of the Amesha Spentas in an accurate manner. By referring to the *yazatas* as the twenty-four "other

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Wiesbaden 1982. The curious attempt by G. Dumézil, *Naissance d'archanges*, Paris 1945, to interpret the Amesha Spentas as transformations of Indo-Iranian deities governed by the familiar tripartite scheme is generally disregarded, although it has some staunch followers (e.g. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *Western Response*, 38-51; *id.*, 'Johanna Narten, Mary Boyce, Georges Dumézil', *PFECIS*, 85-94).

[50] Mainly through the challenge of this idea by J. Narten, *Aməṣ̌a Spəṇtas*; but cf. the review of the work by M. Boyce in *BSOAS* 47 (1984), 158-161.

[51] Russell, *ZorArm*, 155. The passage in question (from Ełišē) qualifies Mithra as "the adjutant of the mighty heptad of gods."

[52] Following the translation by Humbach, *Gāthās* I, 13, n. 17.

gods," moreover, he shows a certain awareness of the importance of the Heptad in Zoroastrian doctrine.

There are no further references to the Amesha Spentas as a group in Greek or Latin literature. Some scholars have sought to find the Heptad in the list of deities receiving sacrifice according to Herodotus (*Histories* 1.131: Zeus, the sun, the moon, the earth, fire, water and the winds),[53] but given the fact that only four correspondences between Amesha Spentas and the deities mentioned by Herodotus can be found (Zeus—Ahura Mazdā; Earth—Ārmaiti; Fire—Aša; Water—Haurvatāt) this fails to convince.

Divine heptads are commonly encountered in the literature of the first few centuries of our era. In various guises and under various denominations, they occur in pagan, Jewish, Christian, Hermetic and Gnostic texts, being incorporated in speculations relevant to all these different religious traditions. Thus, there are the seven archangels of Judaism, the seven heavens of the *Poimandres*, the seven planets attributed to Chaldaean learning, the seven heavenly spheres commonly found in Neo-Pythagoraean texts, etc. A link between these different conceptions is frequently sought. One of the earliest links that was suggested was a link with the seven Amesha Spentas of Zoroastrian theology, but this was quickly rejected in favour of a Babylonian astrological connection.[54]

This Babylonian astrology undoubtedly also underlies Nicomachus of Gerasa's reference to "the most learned among the Babylonians, and Ostanes and Zoroaster" who call the seven planetary spheres "flocks" (ἀγέλαι; pseudo-Jamblichus, *Theologumena Arithmeticae* 56-57 de Falco). This has been convincingly connected with the Babylonian appellation of the planets as "sheep" (*bibbi*).[55] The following interpretation of this appellation as referring to "angels" and "archangels" does not refer to the Amesha Spentas, but was triggered by a folk-etymology of this appellation.[56]

It is likely that a similar astrological meaning underlies Cosmas of Jerusalem's complicated classification of deities, planets and houses in the zodiac.[57] Some of the names Cosmas uses (esp. *Zarathroustēs*) suggest that he used an Oriental source. The doctrine he describes was thought to have a Zurvanite background,[58] because he calls the original deity "the highest god of all" from whom all lesser beings spring. Cosmas singles out a specific group of seven "guardian (ἔφοϱοι) gods." Bidez and Cumont explained this group as a combination of the Amesha Spentas with the seven planetary gods, but this seems an unnecessary interpretation.[59] Since the passage is entirely devoted to astrological divisions, it seems best to interpret the text in a Graeco-Oriental context with little Iranian influence. Of the many names given by Cosmas to the planets, houses, and divinities, none can be convincingly connected with the Amesha Spentas.

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[53] *HZ* II, 179: "a very fair attempt by a Greek gentleman to render the Zoroastrian doctrine of Ahuramazda and the Ameša Spentas, immanent in their natural 'creations'."

[54] For an overview of the problem, cf. now G.G. Stroumsa, 'A Zoroastrian Origin to the *Sefirot*?', in: Shaked & Netzer (eds.), *Irano-Judaica III* (1994), 17-33.

[55] Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', 202 (with many references).

[56] *Mages* II, 283 with n. 2; Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', 202.

In some passages, individual Amesha Spentas are referred to. The most important passages are Strabo, *Geography* 11.8.4 and 15.3.15. In 11.8.4, Strabo describes the origins of the festival of the Sacaea (cf. ch. 4.7.4). After a victory over the Sakas, the Persians built a sanctuary for Anaïtis and the gods who share her altar, Ōmanos and Anadatos, Persian deities. They also celebrated the festival of the Sacaea for the first time; the inhabitants of Zela still celebrate this festival. The names of the deity Anadatos has so far defied interpretation,[60] but the name Ōmanos is the phonetically exact equivalent of Av. Vohu Manah, the Amesha Spenta of "Good thought." In *Geography* 15.3.15, Strabo merely acknowledges the existence of sanctuaries (σηκοί) of Anaïtis and Ōmanos, and adds the detail that the image (ξόανον) of Ōmanos is carried round in a procession. Lack of further information prevents us from interpreting the implications of this information. There are some attestations of Oumanos and Omanos as personal names, and these are sometimes adduced to show the popularity of this Amesha Spenta in Western Iranian religiosity, possibly because of his links with (inspired) visions.[61] Vohu Manah's name is rendered as Osmana in the Cappadocian calendar.[62] It has furthermore been suggested that the "Good *daimōn*" who revealed the laws to Zathraustēs, according to a claim made by the Arians (Diodorus Siculus 1.94.2) is a reference to Vohu Manah.[63] This passage needs looking into closely, for it is extraordinary in many respects: "Thus it is recorded that among the Arians Zathraustes claimed that the Good Spirit gave him his laws, among the people known as the Getae who represent themselves to be immortal Zamolxis asserted the same of their common goddess Hestia, and among the Jews Moyses referred his laws to the god who is invoked as Iao." (trl. C.H. Oldfather, LCL)

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[57] *Ad carmina S. Gregorii*, *PG* 38.461; text from *Mages* II, 271-275 (with notes).

[58] *Mages* I, 175-178.

[59] *Mages* II, 274, n. 10.

[60] For a catalogue of suggestions, cf. ch. 3.2.

[61] *HZ* III, 270; 249; 181.

[62] *HZ* III, 279-281.

As has often been realised, the passage strongly suggests the canonical Zoroastrian version of Zoroaster's revelation: in Airyana Vaējah, Zarathustra received his revelation through the mediation of Vohu Manah from Ahura Mazdā.[64] The problem that concerns us here, is whether the words ἀγαθὸς δαίμων refer to Vohu Manah or to Ahura Mazdā himself (or even to Spenta Mainyu, "the beneficent spirit"). As Gnoli has pointed out in various places, this problem cannot be satisfactorily solved.[65] In a *scholion* to the *Greater Alcibiades* 1.122A, an echo of Diodorus' information can be found: "It is said that Zoroaster lived six thousand years before Plato. Some say he was a Greek, but others say that he was a son of those who have originated from the continent on the other side of the great sea, and that he has learned all wisdom from the good *daimon*, that is prosperous thinking (ἐπιτυχὲς νόημα)." The latter two words can render the names of either Spenta Mainyu or Vohu Manah. Since the tradition has unequivocally assigned to Vohu Manah the function of mediating the revelation to Zarathustra, it seems most likely that in both passages, in Diodorus as well as in the scholiast to the *Greater Alcibiades*, we find an echo of this narrative, which belongs to the most often related episodes of Zoroaster's life.[66]

It is similarly tempting to regard the information found in Philo of Byblos (as quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.52) as referring to Ahura Mazdā and two Amesha Spentas: "Zoroaster the Magus literally says in the *Sacred Collection* of the Persians: 'God has the head of a hawk; he is the first, eternal, everlasting, uncreated, indivisible, the most incomparable, the guide of all good, incorruptible, the best of the good, the wisest of the wise. And he is the father of good government and righteousness, self-taught, natural, perfect, wise and the only inventor of sacred nature'."

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[63] *HZ* III, 158, n. 26; for the passage, cf. Gnoli, *ZTH*, 136-146.

[64] Gershevitch, 'Zoroaster's Own Contribution', 28, n. 49.

[65] Gnoli, *ZTH*, 145 with n. 129; *id.*, *Ricerche storiche sul Sīstān antico*, Roma 1967, 62.

[66] E.g. *WZ* 21; *ZN* 502-523.

The passage is obviously problematic, because of the first of Zoroaster's words: that God has the head of a hawk. This recalls Egypt more than Persia; most of the qualities ascribed to god, moreover, are commonplace attributes in Hellenistic descriptions of the divine. Although Ahura Mazdā indeed shares in all these characteristics, and is the creator of the Amesha Spentas Khšathra Vairiya (Desirable Dominion, Plutarch's εὐνομία) and Aša Vahišta (Best Righteousness, Plutarch's ἀλήθεια), there is little reason to suspect that this underlies Philo's rendering of Zoroaster's description of god. Good government and righteousness were evidently major concerns for Greek and Hellenistic thinkers as well, and are universally held to derive from the highest god. There is nothing in this passage that decisively points to Iran.

It has been thought that Plutarch refers to Spentā Ārmaiti when he describes a sanctuary of Hera (*Artaxerxes* 23). Artaxerxes loved his daughter-wife Atossa so much that he went to the sanctuary of Hera when Atossa was suffering from leprosy, to ask for her recovery. Ārmaiti is the patroness of women and of marriage; if, therefore, an Iranian divinity is interpreted in this passage at all, it should be Ārmaiti.[67] It is, however, unlikely that an Iranian divinity underlies Hera. As happens regularly in Plutarch's *Lives*, it seems that the author attributes Greek religious behaviour to the Persian king, even though the king worships Hera with equally characteristic Oriental exaggeration.

1.3 *Anāhitā*[68]

There can be little doubt that in Asia Minor the best known divinity of the Persians was Anāhitā. She is, moreover, the only

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[67] *HZ* II, 220.

[68] For introductions to the cult of Anāhitā/Anaïtis, cf. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, *passim* (partly outdated, but still important for the collections of sources); *HZ* III, *passim*; M.-L. Chaumont, 'Le culte de la déesse Anāhitā (Anahit) dans la religion des monarques d'Iran et d'Arménie au I^{er} siècle de notre ère', *JA* 253 (1965), 167-181; *ead*., 'La culte d'Anāhitā à Staxr et les premiers Sassanides', *RHR* 153 (1958), 154-175. For an introduction to the Greek epigraphical sources, cf. I. Diakonoff, 'Artemidi Anaeiti anestesen: The Anaeitis-Dedications in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden at Leyden and Related Material from Eastern Lydia.

Iranian divinity whose cult gained widespread popularity in various regions of Asia Minor and who lent herself to Hellenisation and syncretistic alliances with other Graeco-Anatolian gods and goddesses. Given the comparative richness of epigraphical attestations of her cult, and the information on her temples and festivals in literary texts, the cult of Anāhitā is the only Iranian cult which offers possibilities of tracing several developments in Iranian religiosity that would otherwise be wholly unknown. Such developments are the worship at image shrines, syncretistic alliances with non-Iranian divinities and nonexclusive worship of Zoroastrian gods.

a) *Identifications and early history*

The earliest trace of the worship of Anāhitā is Herodotus *Histories* 1.131. Herodotus mentions a divinity whose cult was recently introduced into the Persian pantheon. He writes that the cult of this goddess was an innovation among the Persians based on the examples of Arabian Alilat and Assyrian Mylitta. The goddess is wrongly called Mitra; from the comparison he makes with the Arabian and Assyrian goddesses, and because of his equation of the divinity with the Celestial Goddess (the Oriental Aphrodite), it is commonly assumed that he refers to Anāhitā. In the commentary on this passage, the complicated history of Anāhitā and her cult has already been briefly sketched (cf. ch. 3.1.3).

In the Greek literary and epigraphical texts, Anāhitā is identified with different goddesses. Herodotus and Berossus identify her with Aphrodite, most authors and most inscriptions with Artemis and some with the Mother of the gods. The interpretations of Oriental goddesses in Herodotus' *Histories* present a puzzle.[69] In the majority of cases, Herodotus equates the Oriental goddesses he describes with Aphrodite Urania. This goddess is

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A Reconsideration', *BABesch* 54 (1979), 139-188 (with doubtful interpretations). For introductions to the iconography of Anāhitā and Anaïtis, cf. C. Bier, 'Anāhitā in the Arts', *EIr* 1, 1009-1011; P.O. Harper, 'The Heavenly Twins', *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 23 (1964), 186-195; N. Reding-Hourcade, 'Recherches sur l'iconographie de la déesse Anβhitβ', in: R. Donceel & R. Lebrun (eds.), *Archéologie et religions de l'Anatolie ancienne. Mélanges en l'honneur du professeur Paul Naster* (Homo Religiosus 10), Louvain-la-Neuve 1984, 199-208; L.-I. Ringbom, *Zur Ikonographie der Göttin Ardvi Sura Anahita, Acta Academiae Aboensis*, Humaniora 23.2, Åbo 1957; D.G. Shepherd, 'The Iconography of Anāhitā. Part 1', *Berytus* 28 (1980), 47-86.

[69] For an overview, cf. Mora, *Religione e religioni*, 86-90.

found among the Persians (Mitra-Anāhitā?), the Assyrians (Mylitta), the Arabians (Alilat), the Syrians (Astarte?) and the Scythians (Artimpasa). Cults of Aphrodite are known to him in Egypt (2.41), among the Tyrians of Memphis (2.112) and in Cyrene (2.181). All references to Aphrodite in the *Histories* are references to Oriental goddesses. This is different in the case of Artemis, whose name is used in interpretations of Oriental divinities, but who also occurs as a Greek goddess (6.138; 7.176). This may be purely coincidental, but it may also reveal something on the nature of the goddesses Herodotus interprets.

Mora, in his survey on religion and religions in the *Histories*, has drawn attention to the fact that Herodotus has a diffusionist view on the cult of this particular goddess.[70] He often seems to imply that originally this goddess was worshipped by Assyrians and Arabians, but that her cult spread over the ancient world and was adopted by Persians, Scythians etc.

A different procedure may underlie Berossus' identification of Anāhitā with Aphrodite. Berossus, a Babylonian priest heavily influenced by Greek learning, may have been influenced in his interpretation by the fact that Anāhitā was—in his *own* culture—associated with Ištar, or at least resembled this goddess in several fundamental aspects.[71] Since Ištar is regularly identified with Aphrodite in Greek,[72] the identification of Anāhitā with Aphrodite must have been the only likely option open to him. The interpretation of Anāhitā as Aphrodite occurs neither in epigraphical sources nor in literary sources that are independent from Herodotus or Berossus.[73]

Berossus' information on the cult of Anāhitā is extremely interesting. Clement of Alexandria quotes from his *Babyloniaca* the following (*Protrepticus* 5.65.3): "And yet, after many years, they began to worship statues in human form, as Berossus reports in the third book of his *Chaldaean History*; this has been introduced by Artaxerxes, the son of Darius Ochus. He was the first to erect the statue of Aphrodite Anaïtis in Babylon, and to suggest such worship to those in Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactra, Damascus and Sardis."

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[70] Mora, *Religione e religioni*, 86; for Herodotus' diffusionism, cf. *ibid.*, 225-239.

[71] For the relations between Anāhitā and Ištar, cf. *HZ* II, 29-31.

[72] Cf. F. Graf in *DDD*, 118; 122-123.

[73] A tradition that is clearly dependent on Herodotus is Ambrosius, *Epistle* 1.18.30, where Venus is said to be identical with Mithras.

The monarch who was thus said to be responsible for the introduction of cult statues, is Artaxerxes II Mnemon, son of Darius II Ōchos. This innovation, which must have taken place during his long reign (404-359 BC), is often connected with the sudden appearance in inscriptions of this same king of the names of divinities other than Ahura Mazdā: Anāhitā and Mithra.[74] It is beyond doubt that the earlier Achaemenian dynasts recognised other divinities than Ahura Mazdā, as they sometimes invoke him "together with all the gods" (*hadā visaibiš bagaibiš*) or, as does Darius in the Behistūn-inscription, together with "the other gods that exist" (*utā aniyāha bagāha tayai hanti*; DB 4.61-63).[75] These gods, as a rule, remain unnamed; Artaxerxes II was the first dynast to change this tradition. The reasons he may have had for this innovation and for the additional innovation of ordering statues of a Zoroastrian divinity to be set up throughout the empire, are unknown.

The places Berossus mentions as having a cult statue of Anaïtis, are worth considering: Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactra, Damascus and Sardis. Most of these place-names pose no problem. They refer to the most important cities and districts of the Persian Empire: Babylonia, Media, Persia, Bactria, Syria and Western Anatolia. Most place-names or names of districts are also familiar from Herodotus' satrapy-list (3.90-97) or from the comparable lists in the OP inscriptions.[76] The most problematic city is Damascus, for as far as we know Damascus did not have a prominent position in the Persian empire. Susa and Sardis were famous in antiquity for the presence of a temple of an important goddess: Nanaia in Susa[77] and Artemis in Sardis.[78] Babylon and Damascus, however, were prominent for their cult-centres of male gods: Marduk in Babylon and Zeus Damascenus in Damascus. Berossus' information suggests a national programme of erecting statues, from the far West (Sardis) to the far East (Bactria). So far, however, the cult of Anāhitā has not been attested in any of these cities.

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[74] A^2Sa 4-5; A^2Sd 3-4; A^2Ha 5-6 etc.

[75] For this usage, cf. J. Kellens, 'Le sens de vieil-avestique *hātąm*', *MSS* 50 (1989), 51-64.

[76] For these lists, cf. W.J. Vogelsang, *The Rise and Organisation of the Achaemenid Empire. The Eastern Iranian Evidence*, Leiden 1992, 96-119 (with references).

[77] G. Le Rider, *Suse*, 288-296.

[78] G. Hanfmann, *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times*, Cambridge, MA etc. 1983, 129-130.

There has been much speculation on the iconography of the earliest statues of Anāhitā. This speculation was most often triggered by the vivid descriptions of the goddess in her hymn, Yt. 5.123-129. Anāhitā is there described in various distinct ways and the richness of the description of the goddess has suggested to some interpreters that it was based on an Iranian visual representation of the goddess.[79] Such an assumption, however, is not satisfactory. First of all, there seem to be various descriptions of the goddess which are difficult to reconcile (for instance the fact that she is wearing a golden dress and is covered in beaver skins at the same time). Perhaps more important is the fact that the description of the goddess in many ways resembles descriptions of desirable young girls elsewhere in the Avesta: the golden earrings, the golden necklace and the girded waist from Yt. 5.127 all return in the description of the wives and girls given in reward to pious men who worship Aši (Yt. 17.10-11).[80] The description of Anāhitā in Yt. 5 rather appears to be a composite text attributing to her elements that stress her main Avestan functions as a river-goddess (the beaver-skins) and a celestial Lady (the golden mantle) and elements that present her as the ideal young woman. In view of these Avestan *topoi*, it is unlikely that the description of the goddess is based on a genuine statue. This impression is enhanced by the fact that the statues of the goddess that have been attested (only on coins and stelae from Asia Minor) are all based on Graeco-Anatolian examples.[81] Inscriptional evidence suggests a genuine Iranian component in the Hellenised cults of Anaïtis in Anatolia,[82] which strongly suggests that an Iranian prototype of a statue did not exist.

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[79] R. Hauschild, 'Der Mantel der Anāhitā (Yt. 5.129)—Abermaliger Versuch einer Interpretation', *MIO* 11 (1965), 27-54; *id.*, 'Yašt 5, 87—eine Neuinterpretation', *ibid.*, 463-512; H. Schmeja, 'Das Bild der Göttin. Zu Yašt 5, 126 und Parallelstellen', in: W. Meid & H. Trenkwalder (eds.), *Im Bannkreis des alten Orients* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft 24), Innsbruck 1986, 213-221.

[80] Cf. for the passages Bailey, *ZorProb*, 4-9; de Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 20-23.

[81] Cf. R. Fleischer, *Artemis von Ephesos und verwandte Kultstatuen aus Anatolien und Syrien* (EPRO 35), Leiden 1973; W. Helck, *Betrachtungen zur großen Göttin und den ihr verbundenen Gottheiten* (Religion und Kultur der alten Mittelmeerwelt in Parallelforschungen 2), München 1971.

[82] Especially from two inscriptions, one mentioning the goddess Anaïtis "of

b) *Anāhitā and other goddesses*

In several regional varieties of Zoroastrianism, there are two goddesses who largely share each other's functions: Anāhitā and Nanaia. Whereas Anāhitā is certainly an original Iranian goddess, Nanaia definitely is not.[83] She is a Babylonian and Elamite goddess known by a name that is generally considered to be a *Lallwort* probably meaning "mother." Her cult was known throughout the ancient world, in Babylonia itself, in Elam and Susiana, in Syria, Armenia and throughout the Iranian-speaking world. A temple of Nanaia, known as the *nnystnkn* (**nanēstānagān*) is mentioned in the Parthian documents from Nisa, one of the centres of the Parthian Arsacid empire.[84] Among the Soghdians, her popularity is well attested through the many personal names that have her name as a theophoric element.[85] This practice was indeed so widespread that it has been shown only recently that a separate cult of Anāhitā existed among the Soghdians.[86] A typical epithet for Nanē in Soghdian appears to have been "the Lady" (*nnδβ'mbn*), a title with a wide spread both for Near Eastern and for Iranian goddesses.[87] The name of Nana also occurs on the Bactrian coins[88] and she occupies the most prominent position among all gods in a recently discovered new inscription of king

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the sacred water" (*HZ* III, 245; Diakonoff, 'Artemidi Anaeiti Anestesen', nr. 23), the other giving the goddess the epithet *barzoxara*, an Iranian epithet meaning "of the high (mountain) Hara" (*HZ* III, 271; cf. R. Schmitt, 'BAPZOXARA. Ein neues Anāhitā-Epitheton aus Kappadokien', *KZ* 84 (1970), 207-210). Both inscriptions stress her Avestan function as river- and water-goddess (the latter even as the most important river flowing from the mountain Hara).

[83] There is no satisfactory account of the cult of Nanaia in the Zoroastrian world; for Nanaia in general, cf. M. Stol, 'Nanea', *DDD* 1152-1155; for the materials (not the interpretations!), Hoffmann, *Auszüge*, 134-161, is still important; G. Le Rider, *Suse*, 293-296, is indispensable for the cult at Susa. For more references, cf. *HZ* III, 35-48 etc; for Nanaia in Armenia, Russell, *ZorArm*, 235-243.

[84] Russell, *ZorArm*, 238.

[85] Sims-Williams, *Inscriptions* II, 59-61.

[86] Sims-Williams, *Inscriptions* II, 41.

[87] Russell, *ZorArm*, 245, with n. 44 on p. 257, discussing the MP title *bānūg* (*ML'T*) and Arm *tikin*, both used for Anāhitā. To illustrate the practice further, one can think of the Oss appellation *æxsīnæ* (or *æfsīnæ*), "the Lady," used for Satana, the mother of Sozryko/Soslan in the Nart-epic, who has certain divine qualities. The epithet is also attested in a Greek inscription which threatens whosoever will desecrate the monument with the wrath of Apollo and the Lady (κυϱία) Anaeitis (Diakonoff, 'Artemidi Anaeiti Anestesen', nr. 22; *HZ* III, 245). In this particular inscription, the title may have an Anatolian background.

[88] Russell, *ZorArm*, 239-240.

Kaniška the Great.[89] In Armenia, there was a temple for Nanē in T'il in Acilisene. Nanē, just like Anahit, was known as "the daughter of Aramazd".[90] The fact that the two goddesses are difficult to distinguish has given rise to some dubious interpretations of the cult of Anāhitā.

There are several texts which refer to the temple and the cult of Nanaia rather than that of Anāhitā. The best known text is 2 Macc 1.13-15, which describes the abortive attempt by Antiochus IV to loot the temple of Nanaia in Elymais.[91] This temple, it needs to be stressed, was not identical with the Nanaia-temple in Susa, where the goddess had a different prominent sanctuary.[92] Since, by and large, Zoroastrianism was not the dominant religion in Elymais and Susiana,[93] the references to the cult of Nanaia in these lands need not be discussed here.[94]

The situation is different, however, with regard to Strabo 16.1.4. Strabo mentions the city of Demetrias (on the Tigris), one of the cities founded in the Seleucid period, probably by Demetrius Poliorcetes. It was close to Arbela in Assyria; there was a source of naphtha, (natural?) fires[95] and the sanctuary of *Anaia, as well as the palace of Darius the son of Hystaspes known as the Sadrakai.[96] The manuscripts give the reading 'Ανέας, which has been emended to 'Αναίας. This is sometimes thought to be a garbled form of ’Αναΐτιδος, but it seems better to read the word as Ναναίας.[97] Arbela was one of the centres of the Arsacid kingdom and the place where, for a while, the Parthian kings were entombed (Dio Cassius 78.1). The presence of a considerable number of Zoroastrians in these regions is therefore to be expected. Since Nanaia was incorporated into the Zoroastrian pantheon in various Iranian lands, it seems possible that there was indeed a sanctuary of Nanaia in Demetrias-on-the-Tigris, where the goddess was worshipped by Zoroastrians. The presence of natural fires in this region would probably also have attracted the attention of Zoroastrians.

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[89] Presented by Prof. N. Sims-Williams at the third European Conference of Iranian Studies, Cambridge 1995.

[90] Russell, *ZorArm*, 235-260.

[91] For references, *HZ* III, 40-41, and C. Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch* (Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 1), Gütersloh 1976, 202-203.

[92] *Pace* Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 71-75; cf. *HZ* III, 45, n. 63. For another reference to the same sanctuary of Nanaia in Greek literature, cf. Appian, *Syriaca* 66 (Aphrodite Elymaea).

[93] *HZ* III, 35-48.

[94] The mention of a temple of *Diana Sus(i)a* in Pliny, *Natural History* 6.35 (also Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* 6.700), undoubtedly also refers to Nanaia and not to Anāhitā. The famous sanctuary of Anaïtis in Elymaïs, where tame lions are kept "which welcome and fawn upon those on their way to the shrine" (Aelianus, *De natura animalium* 12.23) has seen the light due to an emendation (from the divine name Adonis to Anaïtis) and has been convincingly explained as referring to Nanaia rather than Anāhitā, if it has any basis in reality at all: *HZ* III, 47-48.

[95] The word used by Strabo, τὰ πυρά, refers to "watch-fires" or "beacon-fires", according to the entry in LSJ. It seems likely—in view of the mention of the naphtha-sources—that it refers here to natural fires. A similar usage can be found, for instance, in ps-Aristotle, *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* 35.833a, where the πυρά in the district Psittacene are discussed.

[96] For the etymology of this word, cf. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 77 with n. 5.

A similar difficulty is presented by Polybius 10.27, where the attempt of Antiochus III to loot the temple of the goddess Αἴνη in Ecbatana is described. An Anāhitā-temple in Ecbatana is mentioned in Isidorus of Charax's *Parthian Stations* 6, and therefore some scholars have been inclined to read in this passage a reference to Anaïtis instead of Nanaia.[98] Both interpretations require an emendation of the text, but here again emending the text to Nanaia entails fewer difficulties. The episode as told by Polybius is reminiscent of the exploits of Antiochus IV at the Nanaia-temple in Elymais and of the attempt of Antiochus III to loot the temple of Jupiter Elymaeus, during which attempt he was killed.[99]

Another cult of Anāhitā that owes its origin to textual emendations, is the cult of this goddess among the Scytho-Sarmatians. In the fragments of the *Babyloniaca* of Jamblichus, reference is made to a cult among the local inhabitants of the areas surrounding the Tanaïs (the modern Don). These are said to interpret the mysteries of Aphrodite and Adonis as referring to Tanaïs and Pharsiris. The name of the river-goddess Tanaïs has here been emended to that of Anāhitā as well; there is, however, no reason to assume that she was worshipped by the Scytho-Sarmatians.[100]

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[97] Thus already Hoffmann, *Auszüge*, 273; he identifies Demetrias with Bābā Gurgir, close to Kirkuk. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 77-78, upholds the emendation ’Αναΐτιδος.

[98] Thus especially Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 69.

[99] For references, cf. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 71-72; *HZ* III, 40-42.

[100] E. Habrich, *Iamblichi Babyloniacorum Reliquiae*, Leipzig 1960, 30-32. Cf. also Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertatio* 2.8.160 (Trapp): "The mountain is for the Cappadocians a god as well as an oath and a cult-image, the lake for the Maeotians, the Tanaïs for the Massagetae." Cf. J. Ustinova, 'The *Thiasoi* of Theos Hypsistos in Tanais', *History of Religions* 31 (1991), 150-180.

Several variant readings of the name of Anāhitā likewise present her name with initial "t." These forms may have been influenced by a cult of the river-goddess Tanaïs that existed side by side with that of the goddess Anāhitā.[101]

There are some other unexplained references to epithets or names of the goddess Anāhitā. In the *Lexicon* of Hesychius, the entry Ζαρῆτις· Ἄρτεμις. Πέρσαι is thought to refer to Anāhitā with an epithet meaning "golden."[102] In the famous hymn celebrating the many names and identifications of the goddess Isis (*PapOxyr* 1380.104-106), this goddess is called "Lateinē among the Persians, Korē, Thapseusis among the Medes, Nania among the Susians."[103] The name Lateinē has been reconstructed as a mistake for Anaïtis, but the mysterious Median goddess has so far defied explanation.[104] A similar dubious case is the inscription to "Artemis *Mēdeia*," which is thought by some to refer to Anāhitā (as "Median" Artemis).[105]

c) *The land* Anaetica

A final problem connected with textual emendations concerns the name of the district Anaïtica/Anaetica, a district that has been much discussed in scholarly literature.[106] This is usually thought to refer to Acilisene (Arm. *Ekełeac*‘).[107] The district is referred to in three passages: Pliny, *Natural History* 5.83[108] and Dio Cassius 36.48.1 and 36.53.5. It is almost certain that the district is indeed identical with Acilisene, for the following two reasons.

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[101] Such variants are found, for instance, in Dio Cassius 36.53.5 (ταναῗτιδι); Strabo, *Geography* 11.16 (τὰ ἱερὰ τῆς ταναίδος); Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 5.65.3 (τῆς Ἀφροδίτης Ταναῗδος τὸ ἄγαλμα). All these forms have been rightly emended to reflect Anāhitā's name.

[102] The formation of such an epithet, however, is far from clear. There is a parallel from Armenian, for some Armenians apparently called Anahit *oskemayr*, "golden mother" (Russell, *ZorArm*, 248; 258, n. 58).

[103] B.P. Grenfell & A.S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri XI*, London 1915, no. 1380: ἐν Πέρσαις Λατείνην· ἐν Μάτοις Κόρην Θαψ[ε?]ῦσιν· ἐν Σούσοις Νανίαν.

[104] Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 67-68.

[105] A.N. Oikonomides, 'Artemis Medeia', *ZPE* 45 (1982), 115-118; S. Sherwin-White, '"Median" Artemis in an Early Hellenistic Funerary Inscription', *ZPE* 49 (1982), 30.

[106] For instance Russell, *ZorArm*, 248; Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 92.

[107] Russell, *ZorArm*, 73. The district *Anahtakan* on map 2 in *ZorArm* is based on the Greek and Latin evidence, and on the name of a spring near mt. Ararat called the *Anahtakan ałbiwr*, "the spring of Anahit." There is no corroborative evidence for this name in Armenian literature.

[108] In addition, Pliny also mentions a *lacus Anaeticus* in *Natural History* 16.157, which he locates in Asia (that is, Anatolia), the reeds of which are said to have been of a superb quality.

In 36.48.1, Dio Cassius describes how Pompey became lord over "the land of Anaïtis, which belongs to Armenia and is dedicated to a certain goddess of the same name." In the following passage, he describes how Mithridates advances, following Pompey, into "the Armenia of Tigranes." The district *Anaïtica* must therefore have been part of Armenia as it was defined under Tigranes the Great. When Tigranes married Mithradates' daughter Cleopatra, he left his father-in-law Lesser Armenia; the district Anaetica can therefore not have been part of Lesser Armenia.[109] The first district Mithridates would have encountered in "the Armenia of Tigranes" would therefore be a likely candidate for the district of Anaitica. This area, reached upon crossing the Euphrates, is the district Acilisene with which the land Anaitica is usually identified. The same is suggested by Pliny, who describes the directions of the Euphrates: "First it flows through Derzene, then through Anaetica, separating the districts of Armenia from Cappadocia."[110] Derzene (or Derxēnē) corresponds to the district Derjan with its main centre Bagayaric, famous for its temple of Mithra.[111] If we follow the Euphrates from there, the next district is indeed the district Acilisene, with its famous Anāhitā-temple. The conclusion therefore seems inescapable that Anaïtica was indeed a name for the district Acilisene (Arm *Ekełeac'*).

d) Temples, sanctuaries and temple-states

There are some good reasons why this district in particular would have been named after the goddess: Acilisene possessed one of the largest Anāhitā-sanctuaries of Anatolia and the most important Anāhitā-sanctuary of Armenia. It is to these sanctuaries that we must turn now. There are several passages where only the presence of an Anāhitā-temple is mentioned. Isidorus of Charax mentions a temple of Artemis at Kongkobar and a temple of Anāhitā in Ecbatana. To the latter mention he adds: "they sacrifice permanently" (ἀεὶ θύουσιν).[112] An Anāhitā-temple in Kongkobar has not been located. The existence of an Anāhitā-temple in Ecbatana is frequently suspected, but it has not been found either. It is mentioned more often in Classical literature: Berossos mentions Ecbatana as one of the cities where Artaxerxes II erected a statue of Aphrodite Anaïtis. Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 27.3, also refers to the temple of Artemis, who is called Anaïtis, in Ecbatana. When Darius was appointed heir to the throne by Artaxerxes II, he was granted the right to ask for a gift. He asked for Aspasia, a royal concubine who was greatly loved by Darius' rival Cyrus. His wish was granted, but Artaxerxes took Aspasia away from Darius, and appointed her to be a priestess (ἱέρεια) of Anāhitā in Ecbatana, "so that she would remain chaste for the rest of her life." From this passage, Wikander concluded that "die Tempeljungfrauen der Göttin in Keuschheit leben mussten."[113] This, however, is not what Plutarch writes; he explicitly mentions a priestess (and one only), who is supposed to lead a life in which she is ἁγνή, "holy", "chaste", etc. This is still quite far from proving the presence of temple-virgins. There is no confirmation for the presence of such priestesses from Iranian sources, and Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes* is the only source mentioning demands of chastity on the priestesses of Anaïtis in Ecbatana. The jealousy of barbarians in general and Persians in particular with regard to their wives is a recurring *topos* in Plutarch's *Lives*.[114] The ideal of chastity, moreover, fits Greek conceptions of the cult of Artemis much better than Iranian conceptions of the cult of Anāhitā. The chances are that Plutarch invented the priestess of Artemis in Ecbatana, adding the well-known Iranian name of Artemis for some *couleur locale*. Lifelong chastity is not a virtue in Iranian religiosity, for men or for women.[115]

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[109] M. Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia*, London etc. 1987, 226 with n. 9 on p. 248.

[110] *Natural History* 5.83: *(Euphrates) fluit Derzenen primum, mox Anaeticam, Armeniae regiones a Cappadocia excludens.*

[111] Russell, *ZorArm*, 270.

[112] Isidore of Charax, *Mansiones Parthicae* 6.

Things get worse with Plutarch's information on a sanctuary of

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[113] Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 69.

[114] *Artaxerxes* 27.1: "for the Barbarian folk are terribly jealous in all that pertains to the pleasures of love, so that it is death for a man, not only to come up and touch one of the royal concubines, but even in journeying to go along past the waggons on which they are conveyed."; *Themistocles* 26.3-4: "Most barbarous nations, and the Persians in particular, are savage and harsh in their jealous watchfulness over women. Not only their wedded wives, but also their boughten slaves and concubines are strictly guarded, so that they are seen by no outsiders, but live at home in complete seclusion" etc. (translations by B. Perrin, LCL). For some of the processes at work here, cf. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Exit Atossa: Images of Women in Greek Historiography on Persia', in: A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity*, London 1983, 20-33.

[115] Cf. de Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 18-23.

Hera which allegedly was to be found 16 stages away from the royal palace (*Artaxerxes* 23.4-5): "Atossa [...] was so beloved by her father (that is Artaxerxes, A.J.) as his consort, that when her body was covered with leprosy he was not offended at this in the least, but offered prayers to Hera in her behalf, making his obeisance and clutching the earth before this goddess as he did before no other; while his satraps and friends, at his command, sent the goddess so many gifts that the sixteen furlongs between her sanctuary and the royal palace were filled with gold and silver and purple and horses." (trl. B. Perrin, LCL).

Boyce has suggested that this goddess was Spenta Ārmaiti, because Ārmaiti is the guardian of marriage.[116] Others have interpreted the goddess as Anāhitā.[117] Neither of these goddesses, however, has any special relation with curing diseases. Temples of Ārmaiti are unknown and so is the ritual custom of clutching the earth before a goddess (presumably a statue is meant).

In the same *Life of Artaxerxes*, 3.1-2, Plutarch mentions yet another goddess who is generally taken to be Anāhitā: "Here (that is in Pasargadae, A.J.) there is a sanctuary of a warlike goddess whom one might conjecture to be Athena."[118] The temple of this goddess is the site of the royal initiation, which is administered by the Persian priests: "Into this sanctuary the candidate for initiation must pass, and after laying aside his own proper robe, must put on that which Cyrus the Elder used to wear before he became king; then he must eat of a cake of figs, chew some turpentine-wood, and drink a cup of sour milk. Whatever else is done besides this is unknown to outsiders" (trl. B. Perrin, LCL).[119] Thus, in one and the same story, the *Life of Artaxerxes*, Plutarch is thought to refer to the same goddess (Anāhitā) three times in three different interpretations: Athena, Hera, Artemis. It is only in the case of the latter that Plutarch gives her real name, Anaïtis. This alone should warn us already against attributing out of hand all three interpretations to the same goddess. One could argue that the three interpretations refer to three different aspects of Anāhitā's complex character: Athena refers to her position as warrior-goddess, state-goddess or goddess connected with the royal investiture, Hera to her guardianship of love and marriage, and Artemis to her concerns for purity. Nevertheless, Plutarch did know the name of the Iranian goddess, Anaïtis, and interprets her as Artemis; this makes it problematic to suppose that he does not know the name of the same goddess who is supposed to guard the royal initiation, and does not know how to interpret her.

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[116] *HZ* II, 220.

[117] E.g. M.L. Chaumont, 'Culte d'Anāhitā', 165-166.

[118] Athena here is always identified with Anāhitā in scholarly literature. This is mainly based on the assumption that she was the goddess presiding over the royal initiation. That she has this function in the Sasanian period is undeniable: inscriptions and above all reliefs offer abundant evidence. I have particular difficulties in believing that this was already her function in the Achaemenian period, because there is no evidence for this function whatsoever, apart from this passage in Plutarch, which—if only for the strange identification—is not without its problems. The only Iranian goddess who was identified with Athena is Arštāt, the goddess of Justice (to whom Yt. 18 is inscribed): F. Grenet, 'L'Athēna de Dil'-berdžin', in: Grenet (ed.), *Cultes et monuments*, 41-45.

[119] For the details of the initiation, cf. Briant, 'Le roi est mort', 6-9; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'The Zendan and the Ka'bah', in H. Koch & D.N. Mackenzie (eds.), *Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte der Achämenidenzeit und ihr Fortleben* (AMI Erg.Bd. 10), Berlin 1983, 145-151.

A scarcely better option would be to interpret the three Greek divine names as referring to three distinct Iranian goddesses. Such tenuous suggestions have also been made. Boyce identifies Hera with Ārmaiti, Calmeyer proposed to identify Athena with Aši or Mižduši.[120] It will be difficult to solve Plutarch's puzzling references to these three goddesses; throughout the *Life of Artaxerxes* Plutarch quotes Ctesias, who—in spite of his long sojourn at the Persian court—has provided us with little relevant information concerning Iranian religions. Plutarch's triple Anāhitā (Artemis-Hera-Athena) therefore needs to be treated with some circumspection. At present, it seems, firm conclusions cannot be drawn from the references in this book.

Sometimes, great antiquity is attributed to the cult-centres of Anāhitā. Tacitus (*Annales* 3.62) writes that the temple of the Persian Diana in Hierocaesarea was founded by Cyrus. Something similar is claimed by Strabo, who also attributes the founding of the major festival to Anaïtis in Zela, the Sacaea, to Cyrus; after an unexpected victory over the Sacae, Cyrus—considering this unexpected success due to a divine favour—installed the festival of the Sacaea in remembrance of this intervention and dedicated it to "his ancestral goddess" (*Geography* 11.8.5). These attributions are either romantic fictions or at best attempts from within the local cult centres to claim a high antiquity and an illustrious background to add to their prestige. We know nothing about the religion of Cyrus,[121] and such claims cannot be corroborated with any degree of certainty.[122]

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[120] Boyce, *HZ* II, 220; P. Calmeyer, rev. of D. Stronach, *Pasargadae*, *ZA* 70 (1980), 297-307, pp. 306-307.

The cult-centres of Anāhitā in Anatolia were especially prominent in two parts of that vast region: in Eastern Anatolia (Pontus, Armenia and Cappadocia) and in Lydia in Western Anatolia. For Western Anatolia, the main evidence comes from coins and inscriptions; for Eastern Anatolia, the main evidence is found in literary reports, particularly from Strabo.

1) Pontus, Armenia, Cappadocia[123]

The Eastern Anatolian cult centres of Anāhitā are described in some detail by Strabo. He describes Anaïtis-shrines in Zela in Pontus, in Armenia and Cappadocia. In *Geography* 11.8.4, he describes the construction of the sanctuary of Zela with a story on the generals of Cyrus, who constructed the temple and instituted the festival of the Sacaea after a victory over the Scythians: "And these generals, heaping up a mound of earth over a certain rock in the plain, completed it in the form of a hill, and erected on it a wall, and established the temple of Anaïtis and the gods who share her altar—Omanus and Anadatus, Persian deities; [...] It (sc. Zela, AJ) is a small city belonging for the most part to the temple-slaves." (trl. H.L. Jones, LCL)

Strabo's description of the Anaïtis-shrines in Cappadocia, *Geography* 15.3.15, has been discussed elsewhere (ch. 3.2.3), but it is important to note here that the rituals in these sanctuaries were identical with those in the fire-temples of Cappadocia. The worship of Anaïtis in Armenia was particularly eye-catching: "Now the sacred rites of the Persians, one and all, are held in honour by both the Medes and the Armenians; but those of Anaïtis are held in exceptional honour by the Armenians, who have built temples in her honour in different places, and especially in Acilisene."

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[121] Although there are many theories on the subject; contrast, for example, J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'Le dieu de Cyrus', in: *Commémoration Cyrus. Hommage universel* (AI 3), Tehran-Liège 1974, 11-20, with M. Boyce, 'The Religion of Cyrus the Great', *AchHist* III, 15-31.

[122] The attributions are defended—without any further evidence—by P. Briant, *Rois, tributs et paysans*, Paris 1982, 459-460. For the doubts concerning the attribution, cf. for instance Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 85; *HZ* III, 202, n. 19 (where it is suggested that it was Cyrus the Younger who founded the shrines).

[123] For Pontus, cf. Marek, *Stadt, Ära und Territorium*, 13-25; for Cappadocia, E. Kirsten, 'Cappadocia', *RAC* 2 (1954), 861-891 (and cf. ch. 3.2.3); for Armenia: Russell, *ZorArm*, 73-111.

These cult-centres were organised after the model set by indigenous Anatolian cults.[124] They were temple-states, governed by a priest, consisting of a temple and associated lands and inhabited by large numbers of male and female sacred slaves (*hierodouloi*). The relation between these "temple-states" and the centralised secular powers is a hazy subject.[125] The most famous of the Anatolian temple-states, Comana in Cappadocia and Comana in Pontus (*Geography* 12.2.3; 12.3.36), were sanctuaries of the Cappadocian goddess Ma, inhabited by a large number of sacred slaves, and governed by a priest who was considered to be "next to the king" in importance (Strabo, *Geography* 12.2.3).[126] The temple-states of Anāhitā in Zela and Acilisene were similar to these temple-states in their organisation. There was one difference in the Armenian sanctuaries, however: there the practice of temple-prostitution was common. Strabo, *Geography* 11.14.16, writes that not only common girls, but even those who were of the highest families served as prostitutes in the Armenian sanctuaries of Anāhitā. Only after a long period of service in the temple were they given away in marriage. It is impossible to corroborate this information from Iranian or Armenian sources, for they remain silent on the matter.[127] Strabo records precisely the same for the sanctuary in Comana in Pontus, which he also interprets as being of particular significance for the Armenians (*Geography* 12.3.36). The presence of *hierodouloi* in Anāhitā-temples is not only known from literary sources but also from inscriptions.[128] Plutarch also mentions the fact that the cows kept on the territories of the Persian goddess (Artemis Persia) were branded with her symbol: a torch (*Lucullus* 24.6-7). These cows were used exclusively for sacrifices.

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[124] For the background of these sanctuaries and their institutions, P. Debord, *Aspects sociaux et économiques de la vie religieuse dans l'Anatolie gréco-romaine* (EPRO 88), Leiden 1982; L. Boffo, *I re ellenistici e i centri religiosi dell'Asia Minore*, Firenze 1985, are indispensable. For some examples of the priesthoods associated with these institutions, cf. R.D. Sullivan 'Priesthoods of the Eastern Dynastic Aristocracy', in: S. Şahin, E. Schwertheim & J. Wagner (eds.), *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasiens* (EPRO 66), Leiden 1978, 914-939. For the specific Anāhitā-sanctuaries, Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, *passim*, is still the most important source, even though the general theory of the book is outdated. Important corrections in *HZ* III, index s.v. 'Anāhīt.'

[125] For some important modifications, cf. Sherwin-White & Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis*, 59-61.

[126] Boffo, *Re ellenistici*, 18-21; Sullivan, 'Priesthoods', 919-923.

[127] Cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 248-249.

[128] *HZ* III, 271; Debord, *Aspects sociaux et économiques*, 431, n. 249 (cf. L. Robert, *Hellenica* XI-XII (1960), 135) refers to an inscription from Amyzon in Caria recording the dedication of sacred slaves (*hiera sōmata*) to Anaïtis.

Strabo's description of the sanctuary in Zela in *Geography* 12.3.37 follows the descriptions of the sanctuaries in the two Comanas closely. Originally, Zela was a temple-state, devoted to the worship of the Persian gods. The priest was master of the temple, its *hierodouloi* (who lived there in great numbers), and of the vast estates that belonged to the sanctuary. Shortly before Strabo's time, however, its resources had been reduced, as had the number of its *hierodouloi*, and the reigning priest had been divested of a substantial part of his powers. All this was caused by the ascent of the Pontic queen Pythodoris I.[129] It is interesting to note that Strabo here uses the Greek term ἱερεύς to refer to the reigning priest in Zela. This word is applied to Persian priests only very rarely. Its occurrence in this particular passage may therefore reflect the fact that the priestly functions were largely modelled on examples set by the temple-states of Eastern Anatolia. Strabo notices the similitude with the other temple-states and with comparable Anaïtis-sanctuaries in Anatolia and Armenia, but notes that "the sacred rites performed here are characterised by greater sanctity; and it is here that all the people of Pontus make their oaths concerning their matters of greatest importance." (*Geography* 12.3.37, trl. H.L. Jones, *LCL*)

2) Lydia[130]

The sanctuaries of Anāhitā in Lydia were not of the same temple-state type. The large temple-states are typical of Eastern Anatolia, whereas in Western Anatolia the goddess had some important shrines and temples with more limited cultic personnel. Most prominent among these were the sanctuaries at Hypaipa and Hierocaesarea (Hiera Kome) in Lydia. These are known from some descriptions in Classical literature and from coins.[131] The coins depict the temple of the goddess and her statue, which shows a great similarity to statue-types of Artemis of Ephesus and similar goddesses. Some of the coins of Hypaipa, however, represent a fire in the temple instead of the statue of a goddess. A similar representation of a fire in the temple is also known from the coins of Zela.[132]

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[129] For whom, cf. Sullivan, 'Dynasts in Pontus', 920-922.

[130] For the cults in Lydia, cf. J. Keil, 'Die Kulte Lydiens', in: W.H. Buckler & W.M. Calder (eds.), *Anatolian Studies presented to Sir William Mitchell Ramsay*, Manchester 1923, 239-266; *HZ* III, 197-253; P. Debord, 'La Lydie du Nord-Est', *REAnc* 87 (1985), 345-357; *id.*, 'La survie des cultes Iraniens en Anatolie. L'exemple d'Anaïtis en Lydie', in: *Les grandes figures religieuses : fonctionnement pratique et symbolique dans l'antiquité* (Lire les polythéismes 1), Paris 1986, 85-91; P. Briant, 'Les Iraniens d'Asie Mineure après la chute de l'empire achéménide (A propos de l'inscription d'Amyzon)', *DHA* 11 (1985), 167-195; I. Diakonoff, 'Artemidi Anaeiti Anestesen', *passim*.

A doubtful very early reference to the cult of Anāhitā in Lydia is a poetic fragment from the tragedian Diogenes of Athens (possibly from the fifth or fourth century BCE; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 14.38.636), which mentions Lydian and Bactrian girls living by the river Halys, who worship Artemis, the goddess of Mt. Tmolus, in a laurel-shaded grove, with music. The Tmolus is located in the vicinity of Sardis and Hypaipa, but the Halys is in Eastern Anatolia and nowhere near Mt. Tmolus. It is also unclear why mention is made of Bactrian girls; the reading has therefore been doubted.[133] It is difficult to consider this passage evidence for the cult of Anāhitā in Hypaipa.

The only literary evidence for a Zoroastrian cult of Anāhitā in Lydia are the passage from Tacitus mentioned above, and the famous description of the Persian sanctuaries in Lydia in Pausanias, 5.27.5-6. Pausanias, however, does not describe the worship of Anaïtis in the form of a statue, but mentions in considerable detail the cult of fire practised in these shrines (cf. ch. 4.5.1). His information in this respect is similar to that given by Strabo, who also does not report on specific rituals associated with the cult of a statue, but only mentions fire-rituals in the shrines of Anaïtis and her associated Persian gods Omanos and Anadatos.

1.4 *Mithra*

The Greek and Latin texts mentioning the Iranian divinity Mithra by name have been collected and studied several times, mainly in the interest of the study of Roman Mithraism.[134] The fundamental problem in dealing with the texts mentioning

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[131] For an overview, cf. *HZ* III, 197-253; Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, *passim*.

[132] *HZ* III, 288; Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 86-87.

[133] For various suggestions and emendations, cf. M. Santoro, *Epitheta deorum in Asia Graeca cultorum ex auctoribus Graecis et Latinis*, Milano 1974, 284.

[134] Cumont, *TMMM* II, 6-73; most texts are translated in: A.S. Geden, *Mithraic Sources in English* (Hastings 1990^2); for a discussion and further texts, cf. especially Beck, 'Mithraism since Franz Cumont', 2049-2056.

Mithra's name, is that it must be decided in every passage whether the text refers to the Iranian divinity Mithra or to the eponymous god of the Mithraic mysteries. These problems also occur in the collections of inscriptions and the evaluation of some artistic representations (on coins or in sculpture) of Mithra-like divinities. Many passages in Greek and Latin literature clearly refer to either the Iranian divinity or the divinity of the Roman mystery cult, but there are notorious difficulties in some of the texts.

An evaluation of the Classical texts discussing the Roman mystery cult obviously exceeds the scope of the present survey. However one judges the relation between Iranian Mithra and the god of the Mithraic mysteries, the mystery cult described by the Classical (pagan and Christian) authors was not a religion practised by Iranians, nor presumably a cult in which Iranians would recognise much of their religious heritage.[135]

Our concern, therefore, is with Iranian Mithra, in those texts where he can be clearly distinguished from his Roman double. As is well known, Mithra is an ancient Indo-Iranian divinity, whose name is frequently found in the Ṛg-Veda and in the Younger Avesta. In India, it seems, his important position was largely usurped by other divinities, especially Indra, whereas in Iran he retained (or regained) his important place in the pantheon.[136] Mithra's name, it seems, means "contract"[137] and guarding or overseeing contracts is one of his oldest functions. This function is especially prominent in Yt. 10, the Avestan hymn to Mithra.[138] In this hymn, several important aspects of Mithra are described. He is the guardian of pacts, the martial god who supports those who worship him, the protector of the land of the Aryans etc. He is furthermore lord of fire.[139] His complex relation with the Sun, which is of importance for the Classical texts, is also hinted at: in Yt. 10.13, Mithra is said to go before the sun. By a later development, the Sun and Mithra became so closely related that they were interchangeable.[140]

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[135] For a solid treatment of the use that can be made of many of the key passages relating to Mithraism, cf. R. Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*, *passim*. With regard to Porphyrius' *De Antro Nympharum*, one should also consult the many contributions by R. Beck, e.g. 'In the Place of the Lion: Mithras in the Tauroctony', in: Hinnells (ed.), *Studies in Mithraism*, 29-50, or 'Cosmic Models: Some Uses of Hellenistic Science', in: T.D. Barnes (ed.), *The Sciences in Greco-Roman Society* (*Apeiron* 27.4), Edmonton 1994 (1995), 99-117.

[136] For the Indian Mitra, cf. J. Gonda, *The Vedic God Mitra*, Leiden 1972; P. Thieme, *Mitra and Aryaman*, New Haven 1957. For Iranian Mithra, cf. Gershevitch, *AHM*; M. Boyce, 'On Mithra's Part in Zoroastrianism', *BSOAS* 33 (1970), 22-38, and the literature given below.

[137] Cf. M. Mayrhofer, 'Die bisher vorgeschlagenen Etymologien und die ältesten Bezeugungen des Mithra-Namens', in: Duchesne-Guillemin (ed.), Études Mithriaques, 317-325, with references.

[138] For which, cf. Gershevitch, *AHM*.

Although the date of this development has been the subject of debate,[141] and a conflation between Mithra and Babylonian Šamaš is sometimes assumed to account for Mithra's solar character (and his position as judge),[142] it seems fair to assume that some connection between Mithra and fire, light and the sun already existed in the Achaemenian period.

It is in his capacity as divinity associated with the sun that Iranian Mithra was best known to the Greeks. His solar associations are stressed with great clarity by Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.13: "And they also worship the Sun, whom they call Mithra, (ἥλιον, ὅν καλοῦσι Μίθρην) and the moon and Aphrodite and fire, the earth, the winds, and water." According to Strabo's information, Mithra and the sun are the same. Since Strabo never mentions the worship of Mithra in Anatolia, parts of which he knew very well, it is impossible to tell where he obtained his information.

In Quintus Curtius Rufus 4.13.12, Darius invokes "the Sun and Mithra and the sacred and eternal Fire," a combination reminiscent of the fact that the sun and Mithra are invoked together in the combined recitation of the *xwaršēd-niyāyišn* (prayer for the sun, Ny. 1), and the *Mihr-niyāyišn* (prayer for Mithra, Ny. 2).[143] In the pseudo-Clementine *Homiliae* 6.10, Mithra's name is given as equivalent to Apollo's as representative of the sun. Similarly, Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 22, p. 17, equates Mithras with the Sun. Hesychius, in his *Lexicon*, interprets Mithras as follows: "Mithras. The sun, among the Persians Mithrēs; the highest god among the Persians." The Suda (s.v. Μίθρου) gives: "The Persians consider Mithras to be the sun and they offer many sacrifices to him" (the remainder of the entry is concerned with initiation into the Mithraic mysteries). Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 21.250-251 and 40.399-401, refers to Mithras as "the Babylonian Sun" and as the Assyrian Phaethon of Persia, who is worshipped in Bactria. It is difficult to understand whether the Iranian or the Roman divinity is meant.

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[139] M. Boyce, 'On Mithra, Lord of Fire', *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg I* (*AI* 4), Teheran-Liège 1975, 69-76.

[140] This is noticeable, for instance, in the fact that in various Iranian languages his name came to mean "sun", thus NP *mihr*, Yidgha *mīra* and Munjī *mīro*.

[141] Contrast, for example the late date (post-Avestan, possibly the Parthian period) given by Gershevitch, *AHM*, 35-40, with the early date (the early Achaemenian period) given by G. Gnoli, 'Sol Persice Mithra', in: Bianchi (ed.), *Mysteria Mithrae*, 725-740. Cf. also J. Kellens, 'Les bras de Miθra', *ibid.*, 703-716; F. Grenet, 'Bāmiyān and the Mihr Yašt', in: *Iranian Studies in Honor of A.D.H. Bivar* (BAI NS 7 (1993-1994)), 87-94.

[142] *HZ* II, 28-29; G. Gnoli, 'Politique religieuse et conception de la royauté chez les Achéménides', *Commémoration Cyrus. Hommage Universel* (*AI* 2), Teheran-Liège 1974, 117-190, pp. 132-133.

[143] *HZ* I, 271-272.

Identifications with Apollo are also found: apart from the passage in the pseudo-Clementine *Homiliae*, one can think of Polyaenus, *Stratagemata* 7.12, where Darius prays to Apollo at sunrise to save the Persians.[144] In the *Sminthian Oration* (*Oratio* 2.446), Menander addresses Apollo thus: "The Persians call you Mithras, the Egyptians Horus" etc. In a comparable list, Lucian mentions a golden statue of Mithras (*Jupiter Tragicus* 8).

The earliest (but doubtful) occurrence of Mithra's name is Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131, where his name is wrongly given as that of the Celestial Queen worshipped by the Persians (for which, see ch. 3.1.3). This passage in all likelihood influenced Ambrosius (*Epistle* 18.30), who refers to Mithras as the Persian Venus.

Mithras is frequently attested as a divinity invoked in the taking of an oath or in exclamatory expressions of amazement. Examples of this usage can be found in Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4.24; *Cyropaedia* 7.5.53; Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 4.5 (more or less repeated in *Regum et Imperatorum Apophthegmata* 174 A, as well as by Aelianus, *Varia Historia* 1.33).[145] In almost all cases, it is likely that the name of Mithra is only inserted as the Oriental substitute for Greek divinities. Otherwise, it would be difficult to account for similar exclamations invoking Hera and Zeus.[146] Although it is tempting to assume that Mithra's ancient function as guardian of the oath is responsible for his name being invoked, this appears very uncertain. His name was one of the very few to be sufficiently familiar to Greek audiences to be used in the various sources where it can be found. It is, moreover, unknown to which Iranian usage the exclamation μὰ τὸν Μίθϱην etc. would correspond, since these exclamatory oaths have nowhere been recorded. The extant legal documents do offer a considerable insight in the procedures of taking oaths and undergoing ordeals,[147] but names of gods do not occur.[148] From the Eastern Iranian area, however, we do possess an example of an oath and it is typically Mithra who is invoked. In the Soghdian marriage contract from Mt. Mugh, an oath is sworn *ZKn βγy ZY Zkn myδrʾ nβʾnty*, "in the presence of Mithra, who is the Baga".[149]

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[144] Since this Apollo has been interpreted as Tištrya as well (wrongly, I believe), this passage will be discussed in ch. 4.1.5.

[145] A more dubious case would be Claudianus, *De Consulatu Stilichonis* 1.61-63, where the Persian king is said to swear an oath by the mysteries of Bel and "Mithras who guides the wandering stars" (*et vaga testatur volventem sidera Mithram*). The mention of the mysteries suggests a connection with Mithraism, whereas the taking of an oath suggests a connection with Zoroastrian Mithra. It is very well possible, of course, that the swearing of an oath by Mithra (known to Claudianus from Greek or Latin texts) is here combined with an aspect of the Roman Mithras, that he commands the turning of the cosmos.

[146] Xenophon, Cyropaedia 1.4.27 (Μὰ Δία; Νὴ Δία); 8.4.12 (Νὴ τὴν Ἥραν).

An exceptional case is presented by Plutarch, *Alexander* 30.8, where Darius III commands a eunuch: "Tell me while you revere the great light of Mithra and the right hand of the king..." It is in this passage that an Iranian link between Mithra and the taking of oaths can be suspected; the expression "the great light of Mithra" undoubtedly refers to the sun, who in texts concerning Western Iran is more often depicted as judge and overseer.[150] Instructive examples of similar oaths can be found in Ełišē's paraphrase of swearing formulae used by king Yazdigird II, who swears "by the Sun, the highest god, who illuminates the cosmos with his rays, and who warms all creatures with his heat."[151]

In similar contexts, the worship of Mithra is frequently sketched as being of great importance for Persians, subjects as well as kings. In 66 CE, the new Arsacid king of Armenia

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[147] Cf. A. Perikhanian, 'Iranian Society and Law', *CHI* 3, 621-680; M. Macuch, *Rechtskasuistik und Gerichtspraxis*, 130-138, both with many references, to which S.S. Soroudi, 'Judeo-Persian Religious Oath Formulas as Compared with Non-Jewish Iranian Traditions', in: Shaked & Netzer (eds.), *Irano-Judaica II*, 167-183, must be added for the later developments.

[148] Not even in the marriage contract. Cf. D.N. MacKenzie & A.G. Perikhanian, 'The Model Marriage Contract in Pahlavi', *K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Golden Jubilee Volume*, Bombay 1969, 103-112. The main exception is the Persian *Saugand-nāmeh*, where many divinities are invoked; cf. *PersRiv* 39-51 and M. Schwartz, 'Pers. *saugand xurdan*, etc. "To take an Oath" (not *"to drink Sulphur")', in: C.-H. de Fouchécour & Ph. Gignoux (eds.), *Études irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard* (StIr Cahier 7), Paris 1989, 293-295.

[149] Sims-Williams, 'Mithra the Baga', in: Bernard & Grenet (eds.), *Histoire et cultes*, 177-186.

[150] Cf. Eznik of Kołb, *Against the Sects* 2.8, as translated in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 442-443; cf. also Shaked, 'Mihr the Judge', 18-19.

[151] Cf. Christensen, *Iran sous les Sassanides*, 143-144.

Tiridates I went to Rome to be crowned king of Armenia by Nero. There are several stories relating convincing details concerning this travel, but the best known story appears to be that of the coronation itself, where—according to Dio Cassius 63.5.1—the Armenian king said to Nero: "I have come to you, my god, kneeling for you as I also do for Mithra, and I shall be all that you will order; for you are my fate and my fortune."[152]

In the *Alexander Romance*, the kneeling for Mithra also occurs[153] and the name Mithra occurs in the royal titles and in the openings of letters. A typical formula, for example, is "The king of kings, akin to the gods, sharing a throne with the god Mithras and rising together with the sun, I—myself a god—Darius" etc.[154] Of the royal titles of the Achaemenians little is known.[155] In the OP inscriptions a relation of the king with the gods is not made in any other sense than that Ahuramazda bestows the sovereignty on the ruler. In the Sasanian royal inscriptions, however, the kings do introduce themselves as persons "whose origin is from the gods" (*MNW ctry MN yztʾn*), together with all kinds of different grandiose titles.[156] From the Greek inscription of Tiridates in Gaṙni, we can deduce that certain sovereigns called themselves "Sun," but the suggestion that they called themselves Mithras is an error.[157] There are Classical references to the fact that the kings called themselves "partner with the stars and brother of Sun and Moon" (Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.5.3; 23.6.5) from the Parthian period onwards. As far as is now known, the appellation "sharing a throne with Mithra" and related ideas in the *Alexander Romance*, is an anachronism (for the impressive titles of the kings changed considerably in the Parthian and Sasanian periods); it may be best attributed to Orientalising features in the Alexander romance.

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[152] For the various episodes of the travel, cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 268 with notes; *HZ* III, 39. For the coronation, cf. F. Cumont, 'L'iniziazione di Nerone da parte di Tiridate d'Armenia', *Rivista di Filologia* 61 (1933), 146-154; A. Step'anyan, 'Le traité de Randée et le "couronnement" de Tiridate l'Arsacide à Rome', *REArm* 11 (1975-76), 205-218. There is a good discussion of the concepts of "fate and fortune" (Arm *baxt kam p'aṙk'*) in Armenian contexts (with an outlook on Iranian Zoroastrianism) in R. Ajello, 'Armeno "p'aṙk'", avestico "x^{v}arənah"', in: A. Bausani & G. Scarcia (eds.), *Studi iranici. 17 saggi di iranisti italiani* (= *īrān az dīdgāh-e xāvaršenāsān-e ītālīyā. Hivdah goftār*), Roma 1977, 25-33.

[153] W. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni I*, Berlin 1958^2, 81.20-82.1; 145.6.

[154] *βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ θεῶν συγγενής, σύνθρονός τε θεῷ Μίθρᾳ, καὶ συνανατέλλων ἡλίῳ ἐγὼ αὐτὸς θεὸς Δαρεῖος κτλ.* Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni* 40.20-22.

[155] The attested titles and their origins are discussed by B. Kienast, 'Zur Herkunft der achämenidischen Königstitulatur', in: U. Haarmann & P. Bachmann (eds.), *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Beiruter Texte und Studien 22), Beirut 1979, 351-364.

[156] For this subject, cf. H. Humbach, 'Herrscher, Gott und Gottessohn in Iran und angrenzenden Ländern', in: D. Zeller (ed.), *Menschwerdung Gottes—Vergöttlichung von Menschen* (NTOA 7), Freiburg-Göttingen 1988, 89-114; K. Mosig-Walburg, *Die frühen sasanidischen Könige als Vertreter und Förderer der zarathustrischen Religion* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe III, Bd. 166), Frankfurt-Bern 1982.

[157] For the inscription at Gaṙni, cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 269-279, with notes on

One of the most difficult passages concerning Mithra is a fragment of a myth preserved in the curious book *De Fluviorum et Montium Nominibus* that goes under the name of Plutarch, but has never been recognised as his work. Pseudo-Plutarch's *De Fluviis* belongs to the least liked and least studied texts that have been preserved from Classical antiquity.[158] Of the several sources Pseudo-Plutarch refers to in *De Fluviis* and in his other work, the *Parallella Minora*, virtually not a single author or work is known (e.g. Ctesiphon's *Persica* or the *Lapidarium* of Dorotheus the Chaldaean). This has been explained long ago by F. Jacoby, who has shown that the majority of "sources" quoted by Pseudo-Plutarch are inventions; he lists the various authors under the heading "Schwindelautoren."[159]

De Fluviis is a short text on the origin of the names of rivers and mountains. The stories follow a customary pattern: a hero or a legendary king attempts to achieve something, fails and kills himself by throwing himself into a river; therefore, the river is named after him (or he is transformed into a mountain). Many of the stories appear to be free inventions of Pseudo-Plutarch as well. One such example, from *De Fluviis* 23.1-2, is a story on king Araxes of Armenia and one of his servants, an Armenian known under the purely Greek name Mnesalces.[160]

It comes as a great surprise, therefore, to find in the same

280-281. The suggestion that some kings called themselves Mithras (as acclamation of their divine origin) was made by M. Schottky, *Media Atropatene und Gross-Armenien in hellenistischer Zeit* (Habelts Dissertationsdrucke, Reihe alte Geschichte, 27), Bonn 1989, 129-138, on the basis of the very difficult seventh inscription of Armavir. Schottky's suggestions, however, do not inspire much confidence. For a more sober assessment of the inscriptions at Armavir, cf. Sherwin-White & Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, 194-197.

[158] Cf. the emotional verdict on the book by J.J. Hartman, *De avondzon des heidendoms. Het leven en werken van den wijze van Chaeronea*, Zutphen, n.d.[3] (2nd ed. Leiden 1912), 346-347.

[159] Jacoby, *FGrHist*, 292-296.

[160] Cf. ch. 4.2.1.

chapter a brief reference to a myth that undoubtedly belongs to ancient Caucasian mythology. In *De Fluviis* 23.4, in the chapter on the river Araxes, the most important river of Armenia, Pseudo-Plutarch relates the following story: "Next to it lies the mountain called Diorphos, after Diorphos the earth-born (or the Titan), concerning whom the following story is told: Mithras, who wanted to have a son but hated the race of women, ejaculated on a stone. The stone became pregnant, and—after the appropriate time—produced a boy called Diorphos. Having grown into his prime, he challenged Ares to a contest of excellence and was killed. In accordance with the providence of the gods, he was transformed into the mountain bearing his name."

This passage has attracted considerable attention, because of its possible implications for the problem of the genesis of the Mithraic mysteries. It has been mainly used uncritically, however, and some doubts need to be cast on previous interpretations. The hero (good or evil) born from a rock is a recurring *topos* in a cycle of myths that has known a wide circulation in the Caucasus.[161] These myths are usually connected with the song of Ullikummi known from Hittite and Hurrian sources.[162] There are many more myths or complexes of myths which largely follow the same pattern: the cycle of Agdistis from Phrygia, the *Nart*-epics of the Ossetes, the Jewish myths of the monster Armillus and—for some aspects—the Georgian myth cycles of Amirani.[163] The various parallels and elaborations are listed in diagram 2.

What is remarkable in the different versions of the myths, is the fact that the only myth that corresponds exactly to the supposed original myth—the *Song of Ullikummi*—is the version of Pseudo-Plutarch. All other myths in one way or another depart from this version. The only striking divergence between the

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[161] Cf. especially R. Eisler, 'Zu den nordkaukasischen Steingeburtssagen', *ARW* 15 (1912), 305-312; K.E. Müller, 'Zur Problematik der kaukasischen Steingeburt-Mythen', *Anthropos* 61 (1966), 481-515; W. Burkert, 'Von Ullikummi zum Kaukasus: die Felsgeburt des Unholds. Zur Kontinuität einer mündlichen Erzählung', *Würzburger Jahrbücher*, N.F. 5 (1979), 253-261; V. Haas, *Hethitische Berggötter und hurritische Steindämone. Riten, Kulte und Mythen*, Mainz am Rhein 1982, 208-214.

[162] For this myth, cf. V. Haas, *Geschichte der hethitischen Religion*, Leiden 1994, 88-96.

[163] The different myths and their handling of the pattern—with the exception of the Amirani-cycle—are listed and discussed by Müller, 'Zur Problematik der kaukasischen Steingeburtmythen'. For the myths of Amirani, cf. G. Charachidze, *Prométhée ou le Caucase. Essai de mythologie contrastive*, Paris 1986.

Hittite myth and the myth of Pseudo-Plutarch is the fact that the reason why Mithras makes a rock pregnant is given: Mithras hates the race of women.

This has sometimes been connected with the typical structure of the Mithraic mysteries, the initiates of which were exclusively male. Pseudo-Plutarch's myth has therefore been sometimes invoked as evidence for the Iranian background of this aspect of the Mithraic mysteries.[164] Similarly, his engendering a son from the rock, is interpreted as a mythical transformation of his own rockbirth.[165] While such mythical transformations are certainly not impossible, the question must be asked whether such an assumption is really necessary. The most important question would seem that of the origin of Mithra's name in Pseudo-Plutarch's myth. It seems beyond doubt that the myth has a Hittite background and was adapted in a specific Caucasian, possibly Armenian, milieu. Pantheons which make a sharp distinction between gods for men and gods for women—based in an absolute separation of the male and female religious domains—are among the most typical aspects of Caucasian religious traditions.[166] A good example in the mythical domain is the most important Georgian hero Amirani. There are several elements in the myths of Amirani, the Georgian Prometheus, that suggest links between this hero and certain aspects of Mithra in Caucasian mythology.[167] Similarly, the idea of a rock giving birth remained current in the religion of the Ossetes, where Mary, the mother of Jesus, was worshipped (as *Madĭ Mayrœm*) in the form of a stone.[168] Divine heroes who

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[164] G. Widengren, 'The Mithraic Mysteries in the Greco-Roman World, with Special Regard to their Iranian Background', in: *La Persia e il monde greco-romano*, Roma 1966, 433-455, pp. 444-445; J.R. Russell, 'On the Armeno-Iranian Roots of Mithraism', in Hinnnells (ed.), *Studies in Mithraism*, 183-195, p. 187 with n. 11.

[165] Cf. the literature in the preceding note and J. Knobloch, *Homerische Helden und christliche Heiligen in der kaukasischen Nartenepik* (Kulturhistorische Wortforschung 1), Heidelberg 1991, 7-12. For Mithras' rockbirth, cf. M.J. Vermaseren, 'The Miraculous Birth of Mithras', *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser. 4 (1951), 285-301.

[166] For this aspect, cf. G. Charachidzé, *La mémoire indo-européenne du Caucase*, Paris 1987, 30-38.

[167] The most obvious example is the fact that Amirani and the Armenian mythical figure "Little Mher" (little Mithra) are both said to live inside a mountain, carrying the wheel of fortune and being allowed to leave the mountain only one day a year. For the Armenian legends, cf. J.A. Boyle, 'Raven's Rock: A Mithraic *Spelaeum* in Armenian Folklore?', in: Duchesne-Guillemin (ed.), *Études Mithriaques*, 59-73. For Amirani's misogyny, cf. Charachidzé, *Prométhée*, 173-179; 235-238; for Amirani in the rock, *ibid.*, 105-108.

[168] E.H. Minns, 'Ossetic Religion', *ERE* 9, 572-574, p. 573; cf. also M.

Pseudo-Plutarch	*Song of Ullikummi*	*Agdistis-cycle*	*Armillus*	*Nart-Epics*	*Amirani*
Mithras wants a son	Kumarbi wants a son				
Mithras hates the race of women					Amirani hates women
Mithras ejaculates on a stone	Kumarbi has intercourse with a rock	Zeus ejaculates on a rock	Satan (Sama'el) has intercourse with a rock	The Devil (or a shepherd) ejaculates on a rock	(Amirani is prematurely removed from his mother's womb and raised artificially)
The stone becomes pregnant	The rock becomes pregnant	The rock becomes pregnant	The rock becomes pregnant	The rock becomes pregnant	
The stone gives birth to a son: Diorphos	The rock produces a son: Ullikummi	The rock produces a hermaphrodite: Agdistis	The rock produces a son: Armillus	The rock produces a son: Sozryko	
				or: The rock produces two sons: Soslan and Syrdon	
		Agdistis is a monster	Armillus is a monster and a giant	Sozryko is a giant	
Diorphos challenges Ares	Ullikummi attacks Teššub	Agdistis is hated by the gods			Amirani challenges God
Diorphos is defeated	Ullikummi is defeated	Agdistis is emasculated			Amirani is defeated
Diorphos is changed into a mountain		Agdistis is bound to a rock			Amirani is buried under a mountain

Diagram 2: The myth of Diorphos and parallels

challenge a god and are defeated similarly occupy an important place in Caucasian mythology.[169] The entire myth of Pseudo-Plutarch therefore has links with the Hittite *Song of Ullikummi* and with the religious traditions of the Caucasus. Several other elements of the myth may perhaps be evident from this Caucasian connection as well.[170] One of the remaining problems is the name Diorphos, which has never been explained satisfactorily. It is generally connected with Gk ὀρφανός or Arm *orb*, both meaning "orphan."[171] This evidently explains very little of the formation of the name, but in the absence of further materials the name will presumably remain a mystery.[172]

If we take all this into account, it does not seem too farfetched to interpret the myth of Diorphos as the Caucasian grandchild of a Hittite myth, in which the names of the protagonists and the eventual purpose of the divine scheme have been changed continually. The appearance of Mithra's name in this myth seems to be due to the identification of the Zoroastrian divinity with a Caucasian god or hero, due to the impact Zoroastrianism had on the pre-Christian religions of the Caucasus. With the waning of the impact of Zoroastrianism, this rôle was taken over by gods and heroes with other names, but the structure was retained and remained current—in its own specific adaptations to new types of religiosity, and new cultural complexes—to the present day.

Similarly difficult to interpret are the traces of an Iranian (and possibly not Mithraic) connection between Mithras, a celestial event of some importance, and a festival dedicated to this divinity. The references to this are found in late Christian sources,

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Schwartz, 'Cautes and Cautopates, the Mithraic Torchbearers', in: Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies*, 406-423.

[169] A good example from the Circassians is given by Knobloch, *Homerische Helden*, 11-12: the Circassians celebrate the winter-solstice by decorating the so-called "Tree of Saosryko," named after the most important hero of the Nart-epics, whose legs were taken away from him because of his *hybris*.

[170] Diorphos' epithet "earth-born" or "titan" may be a translation of Arm *k'aǰ* (Georgian *k'aǰi*), apparently an Iranian borrowing, ultimately deriving from OIr. **kavi-* (Av. *kauui-*). The *k'aǰk'* are "titans who dwell in mountain caverns and live an indolent and parasitic life at the expense of humans" (J.R. Russell, 'Pre-Christian Armenian Religion', *ANRW* II.18.4 (1990), 2679-2692, p. 2689 with n. 32).

[171] Thus, for example, Knobloch, *Homerische Helden*, 8, n. 4.

[172] My learned colleague dr. G. Mussies suggested an etymology from Gk *di-orophos*, "having two roofs." Although it is impossible to verify, this is not only an attractive name for a mountain, but it also points decidedly to the most characteristic aspect of the two-capped Caucasian Elbrus.

Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistle* 7 and an addition (or a *scholion*?) to Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography* 3.59.[173] The passage from the seventh *Epistle* of Pseudo-Dionysius has already been mentioned briefly in the commentary on Plutarch. The letter (addressed to Polycarpus) is concerned with the refutation of an attack by the sophist Apollophanes that Pseudo-Dionysius is guilty of treason by using Greek cultural achievements to attack the Greeks. Pseudo-Dionysus in turn accuses Apollophanes of treason because he attributes the acts of god to the faculties of reason and fails to acknowledge the fact that the creator of the cosmos is responsible also for the abnormal events in the universe.

To illustrate this, Pseudo-Dionysius gives some examples of celestial events, in which the normal cause of things was suspended for a period. The first example is a reference to Josh 10:12-14, where the sun stands still for an entire day. The second example is a reference to 2 Kgs 20:8-11 (or Is 38:6-8; cf. 2 Chr 32:24): the ailing king Hezekiah receives a sign from God (on the authority of Isaiah): the sun withdraws ten steps on the stairs of Ahaz. According to some calculations, apparently, this would result in one day lasting the duration of three normal days.[174] This is taken up by Pseudo-Dionysius and connected loosely with the following statement: "I will then say nothing about the great marvels in Egypt or about the divine signs that appeared in other circumstances, but (I mention) only the well-known celestial miracles that have been celebrated all along the world and by all peoples. It is true that Apollophanes will certainly say that these things are not real. But above all, this is recorded in the sacred utterances of the Persians, and to the present day the Magi celebrate the memory of the triple Mithra. But let him be allowed to disbelieve these things through ignorance or lack of experience"[175]

This triple (τριπλάσιος) Mithra has been connected with the figure of Mithras and the two Dadophori from the Mithraic mysteries, but the context of Pseudo-Dionysius—mentioning sacred utterances of the Persians and Magi—rather suggests a connection with Iranian Mithras.

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[173] To which the commentaries of Maximus and Georgius Pachymeres on the Epistles of Pseudo-Dionysius may be added: Maximus, *Scholia in Epistolas S. Dionysii* (PG 4.542B-C); Georgius Pachymeres, *Paraphrasis in Epistolas S. Dionysii* (PG 4.460C-D). Cf. Cumont, *TMMM* II, 11.

[174] For an example of such calculations, cf. M. de Gandillac, *Œuvres complètes du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite*, Paris 1943, 333, n. 3.

[175] Ps-Dionysius, *Epistula* 7.2 (G. Heil & A.M. Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum II* (PTS 36), Berlin/New York 1991, 168).

A similar connection is made in an addition (or *scholion*) to Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography* 3.59: "Some have said that until now, a festival is celebrated by the Persians for Mithras, that is the sun, which is a reminiscence of the sign that appeared to Hezekiah."[176] This again presents a connection between Mithras and the miracle shown to Hezekiah mentioned in 2 Kgs 20:8-11. It is, however, substantially different from Pseudo-Dionysus' account. Whether, therefore, there is a textual connection between the two passages, or whether they both draw on a common source, or on a story current in late antiquity, is impossible to say.

The connection—if any—with Iran is unclear. Even more so, by the way, is a possible connection with Roman Mithraism. The addition to the *Christian Topography* appears to hint at the festival of *Mithrakāna*. According to Bīrūnī, Mihragān was celebrated to commemorate several elements from the cosmogony: it was the day on which the sun appeared in the world, it was the day on which God spread out the earth, it was the day on which God gave light to the moon, which was a black ball before that day.[177] Although there are many more associations with Mihragān, it seems that at least in the view of some Iranians, Mihragān was especially important because it was somehow connected with the cosmogony (cf. ch. 4.6.4).

1.5 *Other Individual Divinities*

Other individual Iranian divinities are rarely mentioned in Greek texts. Most often, these divinities are presented in an *interpretatio graeca*, which leaves ample room for discussing which divinity is meant. The cases mentioned below therefore almost completely belong to the category of problematic references. In most cases, it cannot be decided which deity is meant, or even if an Iranian deity is meant at all.

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[176] Cf. the edition of the *Christian Topography* by W. Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustès. Topographie Chrétienne* (SC 141), Paris 1968, *ad locum*.

[177] Sachau, *Chronology*, 207-209.

a. *Tištrya / Tīri*

The Avestan god Tištrya is the divinity of the star Sirius. One of his main functions is the bringing of rain, and the myth of Tištrya fighting the demon of drought Apaoša is well known.[178] The Western Iranian divinity Tīri shares many traits with Babylonian Nabū, the divine scribe, associated with the planet Mercury. Nabū is sometimes identified with Hermes (in his planetary setting) or with Apollo (in his function of scribe and archer).[179]

There is only one clear reference to Tištrya in Greek literature; it is found in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* 47: "And he (that is Ōromazēs, A.J.) appointed one star as the guardian and overseer of all, Sirius." The Greek words qualifying Sirius, φύλαξ and πϱοόπτης, are the rendering of the Avestan words *ratūm paitidaēmca*, "lord and overseer" used for Tištrya in his hymn.[180] This is the only demonstrable case of a direct correspondence between a Greek phrase and an Avestan phrase; it may be fortuitous, although the rarity of the word πϱοόπτης, and its close correspondence to the Avestan word supports the interpretation of the word as an echo of the Avestan expression. The Avestan phrase, to my knowledge, is not frequently translated in Middle Persian, but since the MP translation of Yt. 8 is no longer extant, we can draw no firm conclusions from this.[181]

P. Calmeyer also found a reference to Tištrya in one of the *Stratagemata* of Polyaenus (7.12).[182] This particular stratagem is concerned with a trick performed by a Scythian horse-keeper called Sirakes. The Scythian kings Sakesphares, Amorges and Thamyris, distressed by the wars with the Persians under Darius, hold counsel in the desert. Sirakes offers to help them out with a trick, if they promise to give a reward to his children and grandchildren. They consent: Sirakes' nose and ears are cut off and his body is mutilated. Thus he approaches Darius, promising him—

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[178] For Tištrya, cf. now A. Panaino, *Tištrya I-II*; against R. Merkelbach's strange theory that the hymn to Tištrya has an Egyptian background ('Tištrya-Sirius und die Nilflut im Avesta', in *Isisfeste in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 5), Meisenheim am Glan 1963, 70-76) cf. ch. 2.3.3.

[179] Russell, *ZorArm*, 289-292; *HZ* II, 31-33.

[180] Yt. 8.44: *(Tištrīm ... yazamaide) yim ratūm paitidaēmca vīspaēšąm stārąm fradaθaṯ ahurō mazdå yaθa narąm zaraθuštrəm*. "(We worship Tištrya) whom Ahura Mazdā made lord and overseer of all stars, just as (he made) Zarathustra (a lord and overseer) of all men."

[181] In the *GBd*, Tištar occupies a far more modest place in the constellations of stars, being the ruler of the East (*spāhbed ī xwarāsān*; *GBd*. 2.4; 5A3 etc.).

[182] P. Calmeyer, 'Der "Apollon" des Dareios', *AMI* 22 (1989), 125-130.

as revenge for the atrocities the Scythians had inflicted upon him—victory over the Scythians. He leads Darius and the army into the desert, where they quickly run out of water and food. Then he explains to them that he wanted to save the Sakas and to defeat the Persians. He is killed instantaneously: "But Darius, having put on the *candys* and the *tiara* with the sceptre, and having tied on the royal diadem, stood still on the earth. And he prayed to Apollo—it was at sunrise—that, if he wanted the Persians to be rescued, he would produce water from heaven. The god listened and a great rainstorm came."

Since Tištrya is closely associated with the bringing of rain, Calmeyer suggested that the Apollo mentioned by Polyaenus could best be interpreted as Tištrya. In the bilingual Parthian-Greek inscription from Mesene,[183] moreover, the Greek divinity Apollo is rendered in the Parthian text as *tyry*, Tīri. Since Tištrya, associated with rain, and Tīri were equated, and Tīri was identified with Greek Apollo, Calmeyer concluded that the Apollo of Darius mentioned by Polyaenus refers to Tištrya/Tīri.

There are some problems with this reconstruction, however. The first of these problems is the fact that the worship of Apollo is explicitly associated with the rising of the sun. This leaves ample room for the more customary equation of Apollo with Mithra, who presides over the watch of the day between sunrise and noon. Mithra is, moreover, also hailed as a divinity who brings rain (Yt. 10.61), although this particular passage refers to a liberating act performed by him at the beginning of creation.[184] Darius, moreover, clearly implores Apollo to save the Persian people; saving the (righteous) armies is one of the clearly recognisable functions of Mithra throughout the tradition. Polyaenus' stratagem is a story, not a transcript of an actual ritual. Within such a framework, it would be surprising to find a reference to a divinity who is otherwise only known from one passage in Greek literature (Plutarch) and who is there not associated with Apollo. All evidence can also be interpreted as a reference to Mithra.

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[183] For this inscription, found on the thighs of a Heracles-statue from Mesene, cf. W.I. Al-Salihi, 'The Weary Hercules of Mesene', *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987), 159-167; F.A. Pennacchietti, 'L'iscrizione bilingue greco-partica dell'Eracle di Seleucia', *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987), 169-185; P. Bernard, 'Vicissitudes au gré de l'histoire d'une statue en bronze d'Héraclès entre Séleucie du Tigre et la Mésène', *JS* 1990, 3-68; E. Morano, 'Contributi all'interpretazione della bilingue greco-partica dell'Eracle di Seleucia', *PFECIS*, 229-238.

[184] For which, cf. Kreyenbroek, 'On Spenta Mainyu's Role', *passim*.

There is therefore little reason to find a reference to Tištrya in Polyaenus' stratagem.

b. *Khvarenah*[185]

The concept of *x^{v}arənah*, usually translated as "glory," is a central notion in Zoroastrianism. The word (MP *xwarrah*, NP *farr*; *xorrah*) refers to a visible substance which is possessed by the gods and accompanies rulers and heroes. It has a beneficent effect on the life and deeds of the persons possessing it. It is connected—at least in one of its manifestations—with the rulers, the Aryan peoples and the followers of Zarathustra.[186] The epic parts of Yt. 19, a hymn that is (together with Yt. 18) largely devoted to the concept, contain stories concerning those who possessed the *khvarenah* and those who tried to seize the *khvarenah* but failed. The best known of these is the story of Yima, the first ruler of the world, who possessed *khvarenah* for a long time, but lost it because of his sins. The *khvarenah* retreats from those who possess it when they offend against the rules of the Zoroastrian religion.[187]

There has been a long debate on the concept of *khvarenah* in the Achaemenian royal ideology, and on its possible representation in Achaemenian art.[188] The debate on the representation has focused on the well-known "figure in the winged disk," prominently represented in Achaemenian imperial art. Three interpretations have been offered for this figure: it was seen as the representation of the *fravaši* (guardian spirit) of the king, of Ahura Mazdā himself, and of the royal *khvarenah*.[189] It is at present perhaps impossible to reach a consensus, but the argument advanced by A.Sh. Shahbazi and others, that the exact similitude between the figure in the winged disk and the king makes an interpretation of the figure as Ahura Mazdā unlikely, appears to be very strong.[190]

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[185] For this divinity, cf. A. de Jong, 'Khvarenah', *DDD* 903-903 (with references), and in particular the exhaustive treatment of the divinity by A. Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt. Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, Wiesbaden 1994, 15-33 (where, a.o., a new and better etymology is proposed). For Indo-European parallels to the concept of the royal fortune, cf. J.N. Bremmer, 'Caeculus and the Foundation of Praeneste', in: J.N. Bremmer & N.M. Horsfall, *Roman Myth and Mythography* (BICS Suppl. 52), London 1987, 49-62, p. 56 with n. 34 (with references).

[186] Cf. for all these matters, Hintze, *Zamyād-Yašt*, 15-33, *passim*.

[187] It shares this aspect with Aši. For these matters, cf. Kreyenbroek, 'On the Shaping of Zoroastrian Theology', 137-138.

[188] For references, cf. de Jong, 'Khvarenah'.

[189] These theories are summed up in P. Lecoq, 'Un problème de religion achéménide: Ahura Mazda ou Xvarnah?', in: *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin Oblata* (AI 23), Leiden 1984, 301-326, pp. 311-320. Lecoq defends an interpretation of the figure as Ahura Mazdā. The suggestion that it represents *khvarenah*

What concerns us here, is the manifestation of the concept of the royal *khvarenah* in Greek and Latin literature. There are several passages which have been used in the discussion on *khvarenah* as containing Greek references to this concept. The Greek and Latin terms thought to translate the concept include τύχη, δόξα, δαίμων βασιλέως, δαίμων Περσῶν and *fortuna*. Some corroborative evidence for this can be found in Arm *p'aṙk'* (a loanword from Iranian), "fortune," which is used to translate several of these words.[191]

Most relevant texts have been discussed by Shahbazi, and we can therefore be brief about the subject. In the *Life of Alexander* 30.12, Darius III exclaims: "O ye gods of my race and my kingdom, above all things else grant that I may leave the fortune of Persia reestablished in the prosperity wherein I found it" (trl. B. Perrin, *LCL*).[192] Likewise, Darius says that the fortune of the Persians now sides with the Macedonians (*Life of Alexander* 30.4). Interpreting these references to the fortune (τύχη) of the Persians as texts concerning the *khvarenah* of the Aryans is a very attractive possibility. The concept of *tychē* is very prominent in Hellenistic thought as well; there is therefore ample room to suggest that Plutarch here uses a Greek notion.

This is less evident in texts mentioning the existence of a cult of the royal *daimōn* or the royal *tychē*. The royal *daimōn* is mentioned in contexts of court etiquette. Guests at a royal banquet

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was argued most fully by A.Sh. Shahbazi, 'An Achaemenid symbol I. A farewell to "Fravahr and Ahuramazda"', *AMI* 7 (1974) 135-144; 'An Achaemenid symbol II. Farnah "(God given) Fortune" symbolised', *AMI* 13 (1980) 119-147.

[190] A.Sh. Shahbazi, 'Achaemenid Symbol II', 136-137, misunderstood and subsequently ignored by P. Lecoq, 'Problème de religion achéménide', 320.

[191] R. Ajello, 'Armeno "p'aṙk'", avestico "x^{v}arənah", in: A. Bausani & G. Scarcia (eds.), *Studi iranici. 17 saggi di iranisti Italiani* (= *īrān az dīdgāh-e xāvaršenāsān-e ītālīyā. hevdah goftār*), Roma 1977, 25-33.

[192] Shahbazi's interpretation of *Life of Alexander* 30.3-4 is questionable: there, Darius says "Alas for the *daimōn* of the Persians" upon hearing that his wife has died a captive. Shahbazi interprets this *daimōn* as *khvarenah* as well; this is not how Darius' servant understood it, however, for he responds by saying that Darius has no business to attribute this fate to "the evil *daimonion*" of the Persians. This can only refer to Ahreman.

are invited to revere the royal *daimōn* when eating and drinking (Plutarch, *Life of Artaxerxes* 15). A special table existed, on which gifts for the royal *daimōn* were customarily placed (Athenaeus, *Deiphnosophists* 6.60.252). Shahbazi has convincingly connected these customs with the worship of the royal *khvarenah*.[193]

The royal Tyche occurs in a description of the oath sworn by the kings of Pontus in the sanctuary of Men Pharnakou in Kabeira: they invoked the Royal Tyche and Men Pharnakou (Strabo, *Geography* 12.3.31). Whether this reflects the Iranian concept of *khvarenah* (the Iranian ancestry was important for the Pontic kings) or the Hellenistic concept of *tychē* is difficult to decide.

The concept of *Khvarenah* has also been recognised in a vision of Cyrus reported by Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.23.46 (quoting Dino): Cyrus saw in a dream the Sun standing at his feet; he tried to seize it three times but did not succeed; the sun turned and slipped away. This was explained by the Magi as a prediction that he would reign for thirty years. The theme of the *khvarenah* evading the grasp of kings who try to seize it, is well developed in Yt. 19. *Khvarenah* is a luminous substance. It has been suggested, therefore, that the Sun in Cyrus' vision represents *khvarenah*.[194] In the absence of further corroborative materials, such an interpretation cannot be ascertained.

c. *The Fravašis*[195]

In ancient Zoroastrianism, the cult of the Fravašis was a prominent part of religious life. The Fravašis are the spirits of the dead, who are worshipped with sacrifices and prayers. In the long hymn devoted to them, Yt. 13, they also act as Ahura Mazdā's aids in the sustenance of creation.[196] The festival of *fravardegān*, the last days before New Year, was dedicated to them; during this festival it was thought that the Fravašis of the dead came back to their former dwelling-places; rituals were performed in their honour and food and drink were placed on the rooftops to propitiate them.[197]

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[193] 'An Achaemenid Symbol II', 129-130; Boyce, *HZ* II, 254 (following Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 131), interprets the table for the *daimōn* of the king as a table for the *Fravaši* of the Great King's father.

[194] Nyberg, *Religionen*, 74; for a different opinion cf. B. Jacobs, 'Das Chvarnah—Zum Stand der Forschung', *MDO* 119 (1987), 215-248, p.227; *id.*, 'Der Sonnengott im Pantheon der Achämeniden', in: Kellens (ed.), *Religion iranienne*, 49-80, p. 57.

[195] For the *fravašis*, cf. J. Kellens, 'Les fravaši', in: J. Ries (ed.), *Anges et démons* (Homo Religiosus 14), Louvain-la-Neuve 1989, 99-114; *HZ* I, 117-120. For the meaning of the word, J. Narten, 'Avestisch *Frauuaṣ̌i-*', *IIJ* 28 (1985), 35-48 (but cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 99, n. 41).

[196] For which cf. Kreyenbroek, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology'.

There are some passages referring to Persians performing rituals for "the Heroes." These semi-divine beings were worshipped with chthonic rituals by Greeks. They were held to be deceased men who had attained the status of hero due to particular qualities. Most often, they were worshipped at their (presumed) graves.[198] Herodotus (*Histories* 7.43) describes a libation to the heroes performed by the Magi near Troy, while Xerxes sacrificed cows to Ilian Athena. As How and Wells already recorded, it is unlikely that the Magi would bring sacrifices to the deceased heroes of the Trojan war and the passage may therefore be an invention.[199] Xenophon also mentions the Heroes in a Persian context. In *Cyropaedia* 3.3.22, Cyrus sacrifices to Zeus the King, and then invokes "the heroes who dwell in Media and who are its guardians." These guardian spirits of lands are also mentioned by him in 8.3.24 (the heroes in Syria). It is impossible to decide whether these passages refer to a genuine Iranian practice. The only Fravašis of a particular region or people are the Fravašis of the Aryan lands, who are invoked in Yt. 13.

d. *Verethraghna*

The Zoroastrian god of victory, Verethraghna, was one of the most popular divinities of Western Iran, at least from the Seleucid period onwards. His popularity is evident from the many references to his cult in Armenia (where he was called Vahagn) and by the fact that he is one of the three Iranian gods in the pantheon of Commagene (where he is part of the composite deity Artagnes-Heracles-Ares).[200] The origins of Verethraghna are much debated. His name is etymologically related with the chief epithet of Indra, *vṛtrahán-*. Both words mean "resistance-slayer," but the Skt. epithet came to be understood as "slayer of Vṛtra," referring to Indra's heroic victory over the serpent with that name. Some scholars have suggested that Iranian Verethraghna originally was the same god as Indra, known under his main epithet, but this is nowadays considered unlikely. Verethraghna is undoubtedly a pre-zoroastrian divinity associated with manliness and strength in battle. In Zoroastrianism, he came to embody orthodoxy and strength in the service of the religion. In a later development, his name was attached to the highest grade of temple-fires. Iconographical evidence suggests that Verethraghna's prominence was stimulated by the popularity of Heracles in the Hellenistic world.[201]

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[197] *HZ* I, 122-124.

[198] Burkert, *GR*, 203-208.

[199] How-Wells, *Commentary*, *ad locum*; cf. *HZ* II, 166.

[200] For introductions to Verethraghna, cf. Gray, *Foundations*, 117-119; Kreyenbroek, 'On the Shaping of Zoroastrian Theology'. An entire monograph is devoted to this divinity: E. Benveniste & L. Renou, *Vṛtra et Vṛθragna*, Paris 1934, but many of its theories are now considered outdated (cf. *HZ* I, 64, n. 279; Kreyenbroek, 'On the Shaping of Zoroastrian Theology', 139-141). On Vahagn in the Armenian legends, cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 189-228. On Artagnes in Commagene, cf. Waldmann, *Mazdaismus*, index s.v. 'Verethraghna.'

There is a very interesting reference to a cult of Verethraghna in Tacitus, *Annales* 12.13, part of a long story on the rivalry between king Gotarzes and the pretender Meherdates. Tacitus writes the following: "Meanwhile, Gotarzes, at a mountain by the name of Sanbulos, was offering vows to the local deities; the chief cult being that of Hercules, who at fixed intervals warns his priests by dream to place beside his temple a number of horses equipped for hunting. These, after being furnished with quivers full of arrows, run loose in the forest glades, and only at night return, panting hard, and with quivers emptied. In a second nightly vision, the god points out the course he held through the forest, and all along it wild beasts are discovered strewing the ground." (trl. J. Jackson, LCL)

The identity of mount Sanbulos has been the subject of debate. Earlier scholars attempted to connect it with the cave-complex at Karafto in Kurdistan, because an inscription dedicated to Heracles had been found there. The caves were thus claimed to be a Heracles-sanctuary and the place was connected with Tacitus' *Annals*. In an original and convincing revision of this attribution, P. Bernard has made a strong case for the attribution of Mt. Sanbulos to Behistūn.[202] Behistūn is nowadays mainly known for its magnificent rock-cut inscriptions of Darius (DB) with the accompanying relief. As the name of the site indicated

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[201] *HZ* III, 62-65; cf. particularly M.L. Carter, 'Aspects of the Imagery of Verethragna: the Kushan Empire and Buddhist Central Asia', *PSECIS*, 119-140.

[202] P. Bernard, 'Héraclès, les grottes de Karafto et le sanctuaire du mont Sambulos en Iran', *StIr* 9 (1980), 301-324. Russell, *ZorArm*, 189-192 has suggested yet another identification, Mt. Sabalān.

(< **baga-stāna-*, "place of the gods"), it was an ancient holy place. Diodorus Siculus refers to it twice; once (17.110.5) he merely mentions a region called Βαγιστάνη. In 2.13.1-2, he gives a more elaborate description of the site (now referred to as Βαγίστανον ὄρος) and mentions the fact that it is sacred to Zeus (and, unfortunately, that its foundation is due to queen Semiramis).

Bernard has suggested that the temple of Hercules/Verethraghna would have been located in the vicinity of the monuments.

Whatever the exact localisation, Tacitus gives some remarkable observations. Hercules was not the only god to be worshipped at Mt. Sambulos, but he was the most important one. Worshipping Verethraghna would seem entirely fitting in the context of the story, where Gotarzes is evidently in need of victory. The remarks on the nightly visions recall the fact that Verethraghna is a divinity who specialises in various manifestations (ten of which are listed in Yt. 14). There are also various indications of a well-developed Zoroastrian mythology connected with the hunt.[203]

1.6 *Elements and Luminaries*[204]

The fact that the Persians did not worship statues, but used the elements and luminaries as icons of their gods, is a *topos* in both pagan and Christian writings on the Persian religion. The ancient evaluation of this aspect of Zoroastrianism has varied considerably; certain authors praised the Persians for it, others ridiculed them. Especially in early Christian literature the subject is often discussed; there, it is considered only slightly better than the worship of statues of the gods.

The origin of many of the passages stressing the worship of divinised natural phenomena is the list of Persian gods given by Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131: heaven (= Zeus); the sun; the moon; the earth; fire; water; the winds. These, to be sure, all represent divine beings in Zoroastrian literature (cf. ch. 3.1.3). Earlier scholars considered the representation of the Persian pantheon by Herodotus evidence for the existence of pre-Zoroastrian nature-worship, but it is questionable whether such a religion ever existed; Zoroastrians, moreover, worshipped the same elements and luminaries. An identical list appears in Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.13. Herodotus is the basic text of reference for Celsus in his discussion with Origen on the originality of Judaism (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.41).

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[203] For which, cf. Ph. Gignoux, 'La chasse dans l'Iran sassanide', in: Gh. Gnoli (ed.), *Orientalia Romana 5. Iranian Studies* (SOR 52), Rome 1983, 101-118.

[204] For general introductions, cf. G. Delling, 'στοιχεῖον', *ThWNT* 7 (1964), 670-687; A. Lumpe, 'Elementum', *RAC* 4 (1959), 1073-1100 (with references).

Comparable information is given in some passages from Cicero, who stresses the Persian belief that it is wrong to confine the deities to temples, because the entire world is the temple of the gods (*De re publica* 3.9.14; *De legibus* 2.10.26; Cicero gives this as the main reason why Xerxes burned the Acropolis). Similarly, Clement of Alexandria quotes Dino as his authority on these matters: the Persians and the Medes worship fire; their rituals are performed in the open air and they think that fire and water are the only statues of the gods (*Protrepticus* 5.65.1). Such information is also given by Diogenes Laertius (1.6), who states that according to the Magi the gods are (made of) fire, earth and water.[205]

The worship of individual elements and luminaries is also well attested. Most passages on this subject mention the worship of fire and water. Fire and water indeed occupy a very prominent place in Zoroastrian devotional and ritual life. Fire is the main icon of the divine in this world and the central focus of most ritual activities (cf. ch. 4.5.1). Water is also sometimes mentioned as the recipient of sacrifices (Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.14; cf. ch. 3.2.3). Most regularly, however, the divine nature of water is illustrated by pointing at the great care taken by Persians not to defile sources of water (cf. ch. 4.8.1). Of the other elements, the earth is sometimes represented as recipient of sacrifices; these sacrifices are usually libations; it is likely that some confusion between Greek chthonic libations and Iranian practices underlies most of these passages (cf. ch. 4.6.1).

Of the luminaries, it is mainly the Sun whose worship is stressed. The moon is only sometimes mentioned as a god among the Persians (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131; possibly also 7.37; Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.13). It is sometimes assumed, however, that the Anatolian moon-god Men took over several aspects of the Iranian moon-god Māh.[206] Thus, Strabo writes that the kings of Pontus swore an oath by the royal Tyche and Mēn Pharnakou in the sanctuary of Men Pharnakou at Kabeira in Pontus (*Geography* 12.3.31).[207] The epithet accorded to Men, Φαρνάκου, can be explained in two different ways. It either reflects the name of the founder of the cult of Men at the temple where the royal oath was sworn (Pharnaces),[208] or it reflects a form of the Iranian epithet *x^{v}arənaŋ^{u}haṇt-*, "possessing glory" which is also used for Māh (Yt. 7.5). Phonetically, this interpretation is possible; the river-name *x^{v}arənaŋ^{u}haitī-* (Yt. 19.67) was known in the West as *Pharnacotis* (Pliny, *Natural History* 6.94);[209] it is conceivable that Pharnakou could render such an Iranian epithet.[210] The divinity Men Pharnakou, however, is in all likelihood not the Zoroastrian Māh, but can be a syncretistic Anatolian-Iranian deity of the moon.

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[205] And cf. Vitruvius, *De architectura* 8.praef.1, where the Magi are said to claim that water and fire are the most important elements.

The worship of the Sun is described in many passages.[211] Well-known examples are the descriptions of royal processions and rituals, which mention chariots of Zeus, the Sun and the Hearth fire. Similarly, sacrifices of horses for the Sun are described.[212] Prayers were said at sunrise (cf. ch. 4.6.3). The Sun and Mithra were at times identified, but are usually treated as independent divinities (ch. 4.1.4).

The worship of the elements and other natural phenomena is a characteristic generally attributed to the Persians (and many other nations and schools) in Christian polemical writings. The rhetoric against element-worship has its origins in Jewish polemical literature against those nations which do not worship statues of the gods, but have their own specific form of worshipping created things. A good example of this can be found in *Wisdom of Solomon* 13:1-7, which is paraphrased in the pseudo-Athanasian *Synopsis* (*PG* 28.376B) as directed "against element-worshippers" (κατὰ στοιχειολατρῶν). In Armenian literature, there is a passage where Zoroastrianism is referred to as *tarrapašt̯ut῾iwn*, "element-worship;"[213] Similar accusations of "element-worship" were launched against the Manichaeans,[214] the Stoics,[215] and pagans in general.[216]

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[206] For an overview of discussions, cf. A. van Haeperen-Pourbaix, 'Recherche sur les origines, la nature et les attributs du dieu Mên', in: R. Donceel & P. Lebrun (eds.), *Archéologie et religions de l'Anatolie ancienne. Mélanges en l'honneur du professeur Paul Naster* (Homo Religiosus 10), Louvain-la-Neuve 1984, 221-257. For a more elaborate discussion, cf. Lane, *CMRDM* III, 109-114.

[207] For the oath by the Royal Tyche, cf. ch. 4.1.5; for the religious situation of Eastern Anatolian dynasties, cf. R.D. Sullivan, 'Priesthoods of the Eastern Dynastic Aristocracy', in: S. Şahin, E. Schwertheim & J. Wagner (eds.), *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasiens* (EPRO 66), Leiden 1978, 914-939. For the passage in Strabo, Lane, *CMRDM* III, 67-68; 115-116.

[208] Cf. Boffo, *Re ellenistici*, 33, n. 87; MacGing, *Foreign Policy*, 8, n. 33.

[209] Gnoli, *ZTH*, 28 with n. 43.

[210] For the linguistic problems involved here, cf. P.O. Skjaervø, '*Farnah-*: Mot Mède en Vieux-perse?', *BSL* 73 (1983), 241-259; Hintze, *Zamyād-Yašt*, 28-33.

[211] The passages relevant to the Achaemenian period can be found in B. Jacobs, 'Der Sonnengott im Pantheon der Achämeniden', in: Kellens (ed.), *La religion iranienne*, 49-80. The interpretation of these texts, however, is far from convincing; his suggestion that Ahura Mazdā and the Sun enjoyed a shared position as highest god (noticeable also in iconographical sources) is contradicted by all OP inscriptions.

[212] For the texts, cf. W. Nagel & B. Jacobs, 'Königsgötter und Sonnengottheit bei altiranischen Dynastien', *IrAnt* 24 (1989), 337-391.

These accusations usually refer to theologies in which a cult of the elements indeed has its recognised place. In Manichaean mythology, the Five Elements occupy a prominent place,[217] several Stoic philosophers interpreted the elements as divinities (albeit perishable ones),[218] and the astrologer Vettius Valens is known for his invocation of the planets and the elements in the closing words of the seventh book of his *Anthologies*.[219]

The Iranian reality to which the passages on Iranian element-worship refer, however, is more problematic. In the Iranian Manichaean texts, the Elements are identified with the Amahraspands (i.e. the Amesha Spentas). The Amesha Spentas are often described as the elements (especially in Western academic literature), but this is slightly misleading. They govern the seven elements of the ritual and the seven constituent parts of creation. Identifying them with "the elements" as they are commonly understood—water, earth, fire, and air—is not very illuminating, because the element "air" is not one of the seven "elements" of creation, and is not guarded by an Amesha Spenta.[220] It is only in one late Zoroastrian text that a formal theology concerning "the elements" can be found. The passage in question is *WZ* 27.4:[221] "The worship of the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—, they are corporeal and the creatures are fashioned from them, (is) to keep them clean and purified from dead matter, menstruation, excrement and other destruction, so that the forms that will be fashioned from them will be of better nature, more fragrant, purer and with less blemish."

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[213] Russell, *ZorArm*, 155.

[214] E.g. Filastrius 61.3: *elementa adorantes*.

[215] E.g. Philo, *De vita contemplativa* 3.472M; *De Decalogo* 53.189M.

[216] Cf. the passages from Ambrosiaster and (pseudo-) Maximus of Turin quoted by Cumont, *Rel.orient.*^{4}, 298, n. 16.

[217] They are regularly identified in the MIr Manichaean texts with the Amesha Spentas (MMP *mhr'spnd'n*; Sgd. *mrδ'spnd*). For the significance of this, see below; for references: W. Sundermann, 'Namen von Göttern, Dämonen und Menschen in den iranischen Versionen des manichäischen Mythos', *AoF* 6 (1979), 95-133, p. 101 nr. 3/4.1.1.

[218] For references, cf. Nilsson, *GGR* II, 258-259.

[219] Vettius Valens, *Anthologiae* 7.5 (293.27-294.5 Kroll).

This does not correspond to a specific ritual, but belongs to a text discussing virtues. The following remarks in the passage, for instance, concern "the cult of man" which is explained as generosity. Apart from this passage, however, there are no traces of a formal worship of the elements. Fire, of course, was worshipped and water, earth, and air had an important position in Zoroastrian doctrine and ritual, but a formal cult of the elements attributed to the Persians is based on Western ideas.

The Jewish-Christian polemics against element-worship are mainly inspired by the understanding that the elements are created and will disappear again at the end of time.[222] "Element-worship" is therefore part of "the worship of created things" (Gk ϰτισματολατϱεία) and almost as evil as the worship of statues. In connection with "element-worship" one therefore frequently finds a reference to Rom 1:25, where mankind is accused of worshipping the creation instead of the creator (τῇ ϰτίσει παϱὰ τὸν ϰτίσαντα).[223] Aristides' summary of the fallacy of the Chaldaeans is typical in this respect: "They worship the perishable elements and the lifeless statues and they do not understand that they have deified them" (*Apology* 7.1).

This deification of the elements, and the worship of the elements, is commonly encountered in Christian references to the religion of the Persians. Examples of this can be found in the debate between Origen and Celsus, mainly on the basis of Herodotus 1.131 (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.44; 7.65). Similarly, Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.13.3, includes the Persian Magi among those who worship the elements (referred to both as *substantiae* and as *elementa*). Theodoretus of Cyrrhus writes in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.39.5: "The Persians call by the name of Magi those who deify the elements." This is repeated almost *verbatim* by the late Byzantine historian Nicephorus Callistus, *Ecclesiastical History* 14.18. In the *Chronography* of Malalas 7, p. 219-222,[224] it is said that the Roman king instituted the cavalry and celebrated the festival of the horse-race for the first time in Rome at the festival of the Sun, in honour of the four elements, because he thought that the Persian kings were so successful in the wars because they worshipped the four elements. Similarly, in Syriac literature, this *topos* is encountered as well, both in general Christian rhetoric against the pagans and in specifically anti-Persian texts.[225]

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[220] For this subject, cf. H. Lommel, 'Symbolik der Elemente in der zoroastrischen Religion', *Symbolon* 2 (1959), 108-120 (repr. in B. Schlerath (ed.), *Zarathustra*, Darmstadt 1975, 253-269).

[221] For the largely parallel passage in the separate text *Abar panj xēm ī āsrōnān* (PhlT 129-131), cf. Bailey, *ZorProb*, 158-159; M.F. Kanga, 'Viōītakīhā ī Zātsparam ch. 27. A Critical Study', in: *Mélanges linguistiques offerts à Emile Benveniste*, Paris-Louvain 1975, 305-312.

[222] Cf., for the latter aspect, P.W. van der Horst, '"The Elements will be Dissolved with Fire". The Idea of Cosmic Conflagration in Hellenism, Ancient Judaism, and Early Christianity', in: *id.*, *Hellenism–Judaism–Christianity. Essays on their Interaction* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 8), Kampen 1994, 227-251.

[223] Aristides, *Apology* 3.2; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.65.

The Christian passages against the element-worship of the Persians are based on two observations. The first of these is that the Persians do not worship statues (which is only partly correct), but worship the elements instead and are equally guilty of worshipping perishable created things. The second observation of course, is the Persian worship of fire, water, and the Sun especially, and of "the elements" by extrapolation.

A final text that must be discussed is a list of elements attributed to an unknown Euandrus by the excerptor Didymus Zenobius 5.78: "Euandrus said that the gods who rule over everything are eight: Fire, Water, Earth, Heaven, Moon, Sun, Mithra, Night." The appearance of Mithra in this list suggested to some an Iranian background to the passage. An almost identical list can be found in Theon of Smyrna, but there instead of Mithra's name we find the name of Phanes.[226] In an interpretation of these passages, Reitzenstein invoked the importance of the Elements in Manichaean and Zoroastrian literature, and concluded that the lists of elements were typical for Iranian religions.[227]

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[224] Cumont, *TMMM* II, 68-69.

[225] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 103 with n. 7; 108.

[226] Theo Smyrnaeus p. 104,20 Hiller.

[227] R. Reitzenstein & H.H. Schaeder, *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus aus Iran*

Both phrases, however, are concerned with the proverb "All is eight" (Πάντα ὀκτώ); this ogdoad is divided into a monad and a heptad. There can be no doubt that the lists are Greek; more particularly, they have an Orphic background. This is not only evident from the reference to the Night in both lists of eight elements, but particularly from the reference to Phanes. It is well known that Phanes and Mithras were connected with each other in the context of the Mithraic mysteries. There is not only iconographic evidence for this identification, but also textual evidence, from a famous Mithraic inscription to Zeus-Helios-Mithras-Phanes.[228] Theo of Smyrna also explicitly introduces the list as deriving from Orphic literature.

1.7 *Collective and Nameless Representations*

Many references to Persian religious affairs do not refer to distinct deities, but make use of nameless or collective appellations of the Persian gods. Within this category one can subsume appellations such as "the god," "the royal gods," "the Persian god(s)" and "the ancestral gods." Little can be said about these passages, although they are perhaps the most frequent in occurrence of all texts on the religion of the Persians.

Several of these texts explicitly refer to "the Persian gods" or to "the ancestral gods." This in itself merely stresses the fact that different peoples have different gods. "The Persian gods," "the ancestral gods" or similar notions are not a concept in any Iranian religion. A comparable statement, however, is the Elamite assertion that Ahura Mazdā is the god of the Aryans.[229]

A similar state of affairs obtains in the case of the "royal gods" mentioned among the Persians. We also have combinations: Darius III invokes "the ancestral Zeus of the Persians and the royal gods" (Plutarch, *On the Fortune of Alexander* 2.6.338F). These royal gods also appear now and then, when Persian kings are said

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und Griechenland (Studien der Bibliothek Warburg 7), Leipzig-Berlin 1926 (repr. Darmstadt 1965), 72-78.

[228] *CIMRM* 475; for Mithras and Phanes, cf. H.M. Jackson, 'Love makes the World go round: The Classical Greek Ancestry of the Youth with the Zodiacal Circle in Late Roman Art', in Hinnells (ed.), *Studies in Mithraism* 131-164.

[229] El. *na-ap har-ri-ya-na-um* (El. version of DB IV, 60; 62); cf. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 14-19; *HZ* II, 27-28.

to perform rituals or to invoke the gods. There are no specific royal gods in Zoroastrianism.[230]

The only usage that may to a certain degree reflect Iranian religiosity is the reference to "the other gods." In several passages, kings are said to perform rituals for Zeus, Hestia, the Sun and "the other gods" or "any other god." This usage is only reported by Xenophon. Thus, in *Cyropaedia* 3.3.21, Cyrus first sacrifices to Zeus the king and then to "the other gods." In 7.5.57, he sacrifices to Hestia, to Zeus the King and to any other the Magi specify. In 8.7.3, the dying Cyrus sacrifices to ancestral Zeus, the Sun and "the other gods" and prays to ancestral Zeus, the Sun and "all the gods."

These appellations recall some passages from the OP inscriptions. In the inscription at Behistūn, Darius invokes Ahura Mazdā "and any other god that exists" (*utā aniyāha bagāha tayai hanti*; *DB* 4.61; 62-63). In another inscription, Ahura Mazdā is invoked "with all the gods" (*hadā visaibiš bagaibiš*; DPd 14-15). This group of all gods has also been recognised in the Elamite tables, although the identification of this group in El. *·d.mi-iš-šá-a-ba-qa* (with variants) has been contested.[231] These passages from the OP inscriptions not only show that the religion of the Achaemenians was not a strict monotheism, but they also bear a striking resemblance to Xenophon's descriptions of royal sacrifices to Zeus, the Sun and "the other gods." A comparable function is performed by the *Yenghē Hātąm*-prayer in the Avesta: this prayer is devoted to nameless male and female divine beings, who are included—it seems—to avoid the inadvertent omission of an important god or goddess.

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[230] The reconstruction of a royal pantheon by W. Nagel & B. Jacobs, 'Königsgötter und Sonnengottheit bei altiranischen Dynastien', *IrAnt* 24 (1989), 337-391, is based on an uncritical acceptance of the Greek and Latin references to royal rituals.

[231] For the identification, cf. Koch, *Religiösen Verhältnisse*, 87-90; cf. Boyce, *HZ* II, 139 and Sims-Williams, 'Mithra the Baga', for other suggestions.

2. *The Pandemonium*

2.1. *Angra Mainyu*

The recognition of Angra Mainyu or Ahreman, the Evil Spirit first proclaimed to be active in this world by Zarathustra (Y. 45.2),[1] certainly belongs to the most characteristic elements of Zoroastrianism. Although opinions differ with regard to the presence or absence of cosmogonical dualism in the Gāthās,[2] even there a strong, highly personalised evil being in opposition to Ahura Mazdā is regularly referred to. In all later Zoroastrian texts, the familiar idea of two independent beings, representing total good and total evil, can be found, in various permutations.

There are, however, several texts and contexts, in which the Evil Spirit, or his companions, the *daēvas*, are simply not referred to. A good example of this is the *Yasna Haptanghāiti*, a ritual prose text sometimes thought to be contemporary with the Gāthās.[3] Another example is the majority of OP inscriptions (with the exception of the Daiva-inscription), and likewise most Sasanian royal and personal inscriptions (with the exception of those from Kirdēr). This does not imply that the circles from which these texts emanated did not attach any importance to the Evil Spirit or to the necessity of execrating the daēvas. In any evolved variety of Zoroastrianism worshipping Ahura Mazdā equals struggling against the daēvas and their leader. Publicly proclaiming Ahura Mazdā to be the greatest god and creator equals refusing the evil beings a similar status. Although Ahreman's activities in this world are there to be seen or experienced by everyone, this only requires believers to struggle against evil, not to name it all the time.

The Iranian name of the Evil Spirit is rare in Greek texts and absent from Latin.[4] Most Greek authors have transmitted the name as ’Αϱειμάνιος; Agathias and Hesychius render the name

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[1] Although it has been rightly noticed, that the occurrence of the words as a personal appellative for the evil spirit is a development based upon the Gāthās, not a Gathic phenomenon itself. In the Gāthās, the Evil principle is alluded to by a variety of words. Cf. Humbach, *Gāthās* I, 2-3.

[2] Cf. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 8, n. 6.

[3] For which, cf. J. Narten, *Der Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, *passim* (and pp. 35-37 on the question of authorship).

[4] With the possible exception of two Mithraic inscriptions dedicated to "the god Arimanius" (*CIMRM* 1773; 1775).

'Αϱιμάνης and 'Αϱειμανής respectively. It seems to be a mistake to interpret the name 'Αϱειμάνιος as a rendering of the Middle Persian form *Ahreman* (*'hl(y)mn*; MMP *'hrmyn*).[5] Agathias and Hesychius' names for the Evil Spirit are the only ones to render Middle Persian *Ahreman*, whereas the other name seems to render an unknown OP form of the name, ending in *-yu*. The OP form of the name has not been attested. General rules of the development of Iranian sounds suggest that the Old Persian form of the name would have been **ahramanyu*, which would result in MP *ahrmen*.[6] The Greek rendering of this, 'Αϱειμάνιος, poses a problem because of the diphthong *-ei-*, but this must be connected with the fact that the rendering of the name corresponds to an understandable Greek word meaning "warlike", which also produces an attractive interpretation of the Iranian name.[7]

The earliest Greek references to the existence of Angra Mainyu must have existed in the works of philosophers connected with the Academy and the Peripatos. Aristotle's *On Philosophy* is explicitly said to have contained a passage describing Persian dualism, and similar interests are attributed to the works of Eudemos, Hermodorus and Eudoxus.[8] None of these works have survived and it is impossible to say much on their contents. The earliest author to mention Ahreman in a passage that is still available, is Theopompus as quoted by Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 47 (discussed in ch. 3.3.3). Theopompus writes that according to certain Magi, Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu (to whom he refers as Hades) each govern the world for 3,000 years. These 6,000 years are followed by 3,000 years of battle between the two spirits, after which Angra Mainyu will be defeated and the world will be liberated from the effects of evil. Even though a millenary scheme such as this is not recorded in any of the (many) different versions of the Zoroastrian myths, the general course of events resembles the Zoroastrian division of time quite accurately.

Whenever Ahreman is interpreted in terms of a Greek divinity, he is equated with Hades, lord of the underworld. In some passages he is introduced as "the evil *daimon*," "Satan" or "the worst spirit." Ahreman occurs almost exclusively in discussions of Persian dualism. Thus he is mentioned, in the company of his adversary, Ahura Mazdā, in Plutarch, *De Iside* 46-47 (Hades); Diogenes Laertius 1.8; Damascius, *Dubitationes et Solutiones* 125 bis; Agathias, *Historiae* 2.25; Theodorus of Mopsuestia (in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 72.81). In all these passages, he is presented as the opponent of Ahura Mazdā, leader of the lesser evil beings and cause of evil.

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[5] As is for instance done by Moulton, *EZ*, 425-426.

[6] For the development of **manyu-* to *-men*, cf. the development of OP *dahyu-* (Av. *dax́iiu-*) to MP *deh*.

[7] LSJ, ss.vv. ἀϱειμανής and ἀϱειμάνιος.

[8] For these matters, cf. ch. 3.4.1; for a possible historical background, cf. Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi'.

The occurrence of the name Arimanios in Plutarch's *Life of Themistocles*, however, is puzzling. Plutarch writes how Themistocles—having been expelled by the Greeks—presents himself to the Persian king to request hospitality. The king does not answer him straightaway, but "in converse with his friends it is said that he congratulated himself over what he called the greatest good fortune, and prayed Arimanius ever to give his enemies such minds as to drive their best men away from them."[9] It seems pointless to take seriously into account the possibility that a Persian king would publicly (at least in the presence of his friends) pray to the Evil Spirit. If we follow Plutarch's narrative, the king immediately afterwards sacrificed to the gods and got drunk, two typical modes of behaviour for a Persian king in Plutarch's *Lives*. Having accepted Themistocles, moreover, he ordered his priests to make him hear the Magian lore (*Themistocles* 29.4-5), which only adds another strand to the romantic fabric Plutarch creates throughout his *Lives*. In the *Life of Alexander* 30, Plutarch refers to Ahreman with the appellation "the evil god of the Persians" (τὸν πονηρὸν δαίμονα Περσῶν).

A particular problem occurs in the two instances of Persian human sacrifices described by Herodotus, in *Histories* 3.35 and 7.114. In both instances, Herodotus says that a number of Persians were buried alive in the earth. In 3.35, Herodotus writes that Cambyses orders them to be buried head down for no reason at all (!). In 7.114, it is the Persians generally and the Persian queen Amestris in particular who are charged with this. Amestris is said to have performed these sacrifices when she was old, and to have buried fourteen Persian young men as a sacrifice to "the god who is said to reside under the earth."[10] There is no such god in Zoroastrianism, as indeed the entire practice violates many Zoroastrian rules. If Herodotus can be relied upon here, the sacrifice appears to be an act of sorcery and the possible recipient of the sacrifice may have been either Angra Mainyu himself, as was taken for granted earlier,[11] or possibly Yima in his earlier function of lord of the underworld.[12] Herodotus specifically records that to bury people alive is a Persian practice (7.114). There is, however, no confirmation for this from any other source,[13] so that the origin and the veracity of the stories in Herodotus remain a mystery.[14]

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[9] Plutarch, *Themistocles* 28.6; trl. B. Perrin, LCL.

[10] Plutarch refers to this story in *De Superstitione* 13.171D and interprets the recipient of the sacrifice as Hades.

A final problematic passage also deserves to be treated here. In his *Elenchus* 1.2.12-14, Hippolytus—quoting Aristoxenus and a mysterious Diodorus of Eretria—attributes a doctrine to Zaratas the Chaldaean (who is introduced as the teacher of Pythagoras), according to which there were two causes of being, a father and a mother. The father was light, the mother darkness. Similarly, Zaratas would have taught that there are two *daimones*, a heavenly *daimōn* and a chthonic *daimōn*. The chthonic *daimōn* is connected with earth and water. In *Elenchus* 6.23.2, Hippolytus attributes to Zaratas the teacher of Pythagoras that he has called the Monad "father" and the Dyad "mother." These passages were sometimes given very intricate Iranian interpretations, but it is impossible to connect the speculations as given by Hippolytus to any Zoroastrian source. Nowhere are the two primal beings said to be male and female and nowhere are they said to be heavenly and chthonic. Speculations on the Monad and the Dyad are evidently not found in Zoroastrian literature. It is problematic, therefore, to postulate an Iranian background for the information in this passage on the basis of the attribution of these doctrines to Zaratas the teacher of Pythagoras. Most of the information belongs to neo-Pythagorean and Stoic speculations. Even if the underlying structures—two opposed principles of being—may owe something to Iranian speculations, it is wrong to project the developed speculations as reported by Hippolytus into Zoroastrianism, as if they derived from that tradition.[15]

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[11] E.g. How-Wells, *Commentary*, *ad locum*; Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 59, n. 3; Gnoli, *ZTH*, 151, n. 164.

[12] As suggested by Boyce, *HZ* II, 167 with n. 232; Russell, *ZorArm*, 438-439. An important connection is that with the sacrifices (a.o. of a black hen) to the *ādam-e šīw zwīn*, "the person below the earth," in 20th-century rituals recorded by Boyce, *Stronghold*, 62.

[13] Plutarch's version, *De Superstitione* 13.171D, is slightly different. He mentions twelve instead of fourteen victims and interprets the divinity as Hades.

[14] There is another story of human sacrifice among Zoroastrians, but it is certainly an invention: Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Fluviis* 23.1-2 gives the story of (the imaginary) king Araxes of Armenia. When he was at war with the Persians, he received an oracle, that he would be victorious if he would sacrifice two of the highest-born virgins to the apotropaic gods. Because he loved his own daughters too much, he ordered one of his advisers, Mnesalkes, to sacrifice his daughters at the altars. Mnesalkes, however, fearing that this would not satisfy the gods, sacrificed the king's daughters anyway. The Greek funerary inscription of Aurelius Merithatēs, the brother of king Pacorus of Greater Armenia (*OGIS* 1.382) opens with a dedication "to the gods under the earth," which is undoubtedly to be connected with the Greek custom, not with Zoroastrian religiosity.

2.2. *The daēvas*

The *daēvas*, the evil spiritual beings who have an important place in Zoroastrian mythology and folklore, are only once mentioned by name in Classical literature: Hesychius has preserved a gloss of unknown date that reads Δεύας· τοὺς κακοὺς θεούς. Πέρσαι, "Deuas. The evil gods. The Persians." Hesychius' source for this word is unknown, but the information is correct.

Apart from Hesychius, the *daēvas* are only mentioned by Plutarch, *De Iside* 47. Plutarch relates that Ahura Mazdā created six gods, and Angra Mainyu created an equal number of beings in opposition to them. This refers to the canonical list of six archdemons, who are said to be opposed to the six Amesha Spentas.[16] Ahura Mazdā also created 24 gods and put them in the cosmic egg. Angra Mainyu created an equal number of demons and these pierced the egg, which caused good to be mixed with evil. This is a fair rendering of Zoroastrian cosmogonical speculations, presenting the *daēvas* as opposed to the *yazatas*, created to bring harm to the good creation. Individual *daēvas* other than Ahreman are not referred to in extant Classical literature as part of Iranian religiosity.[17]

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[15] The main advocate of an Iranian background of the teachings of Zaratas as reported by Hippolytus is Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 72-76; for a critique of his views, cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 32-33 (with references).

[16] For particulars, cf. Gray, *Foundations*, 175-185.

[17] In Jewish literature, the name of the demon Asmodeus (Tobit 3:8; 3:17) is thought to derive from the Iranian *daēva* Aēšma, the demon of Wrath. Cf. A.F. de Jong, 'De Toorn in het Iraanse pandemonium', in: A.F. de Jong & A. de Jong (eds.), *Kleine encyclopedie van de Toorn* (Utrechtse Theologische Reeks 21), Utrecht 1993, 83-94 (with references). For the interpretation of the name Asmodeus, cf. also M. Hutter, 'Asmodeus', *DDD*, 197-200.

3. *Zoroaster*

Zoroaster's place in Greek and Latin literature can be discussed only briefly in the present context. There is a large amount of texts mentioning his name, but most of these are Greek and Roman literary fictions which are unconnected with Iran (apart from the name Zoroaster itself). These materials have been collected and analysed in detail elsewhere and are very well known.[1] Similarly, the range of Zoroastrian pseudepigrapha is considerable, but, with very few exceptions, owes nothing to Iranian literature or ideas.[2] The same is undoubtedly true of the famous two million lines of Zoroaster's writings that are said to have been catalogued in the library of Alexandria.[3] In spite of the obvious interest of all these references to Zoroaster and his writings, the possibility that they owed something to genuine contact with Iranians or genuine knowledge of Iranian religions is very slim.

We shall have to confine ourselves to some of the passages that either report elements from Zoroaster's traditional biography or elements that may be attributed to elaborations upon these themes and to the image of Zoroaster as an archetype of Oriental wisdom. But we may start with the most elementary information on Zoroaster, his name.

The Avestan name of the Iranian prophet is *zaraθuštra-*, a name of disputed etymological origin containing the element *uštra-*, "camel."[4] There is linguistic evidence that suggests that the name of the prophet was adapted to the various Iranian languages spoken by those nations who had accepted his religion. Thus, the Median form is thought to have been _*zarat-uštra_, which led to MP *zardušt*; the Parthian form *zrhwšt* derives regularly from the Avestan and has produced the Sogdian *zrwšc*, whereas the Old Sogdian form of the name may have been different.[5] The OP name of the prophet would have been *zara-uštra* and it is this form which is taken as the origin of the Greek name Ζωϱοάστϱης. The Greek name itself is evidently partly the result of an etymologising translation which rendered the second component of his name in a manner reminiscent of the Greek word for "star." It was thus understood by several Greeks themselves, who sometimes translated the name as "star-worshipper" (ἀστροθύτης) or produced even more fanciful interpretations.[6] This version of Zoroaster's name is also found in some permutations, which are without interest for the present study.[7] The Greek version of Zarathustra's name was transmitted to Latin, where it can be found in the forms *Zoroaster* and *Zoroastres* with additional variants.[8]

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[1] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages*, *passim*; cf. also Jackson, *Zoroaster*, 226-259.

[2] Cf. now Beck, 'Thus spake not Zarathuštra', *passim*; and cf. ch. 1.5.

[3] Pliny, *Natural History* 30.2.4, referring to Hermippus who is said to have listed the contents of the volumes attributed to Zoroaster. Cf. Beck, *HZ* III, 525-526.

[4] For various suggestions concerning the etymology of the name, cf. Humbach, *Gāthās* I, 8 with nn. 10-11; Gershevitch, 'Approaches', 4; 19-24.

[5] Gershevitch, 'Approaches', 26.

There are two forms of his name which do require some comment. The first of these is the form Ζαθραύστης, found in Diodorus Siculus 1.94.2, who has possibly taken it from Hecataeus of Abdera.[9] An even more exact form, Ζωροθρύστης or Ζαραθρούστης, can be found in the different versions of a text of Cosmas of Jerusalem.[10] These passages obviously reproduce a more Iranian form of the prophet's name.[11] Diodorus' evidence is more important, because it is much older than Cosmas.

The second name under which Zarathustra came to be known, is Ζαράτας, with numerous variants. Although there can be no doubt that this name is related to the name of the Iranian prophet, there was uncertainty concerning the identity of Zoroaster and Zaratas already in antiquity. Several authors list them as two independent personalities, whereas others affirm that they are but two names for one and the same person.[12] Although the latter position appears to be correct, some caution is needed in situations where doctrines are ascribed to Zaratas the Chaldaean which bear only a superficial resemblance to Zoroastrian doctrines (e.g. Hippolytus, *Elenchus* 1.2.12-14).

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[6] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 6-7 with n. 5.

[7] For instance Ζωρόαστρις (Hippolytus) or Ζωρομάσδρης (Suda).

[8] Cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 389.

[9] Gnoli, *ZTH*, 136-146 (also considering the option of Megasthenes); F. Grenet, *HZ* III, 258, has suggested Clearchus of Soli as Diodorus' source.

[10] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 18; 272: Cosmas, *Ad carmina S. Gregorii* (*PG* 38.461).

[11] It is difficult to agree with Gnoli, however, when he writes that the form in Diodorus "has not passed through the usual channels of the Magi" (*ZTH*, 145). If the name is closer to the Avestan name of the prophet, this could well be the *only* form that has passed through those channels. An attribution of the name to any particular Iranian language, however, seems impossible; whether it is garbled Avestan, garbled Parthian or garbled Sogdian, for instance, does not really affect the general importance of the preservation of a form of his name that reflects his Iranian appellation more correctly than his common Greek name. In *HZ* III, 158, n. 26, the suggestion is also brought forward that the name in Diodorus is "an independent rendering of Avestan *zaraθuštra*."

[12] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 37-38.

There are several attempts at dating Zarathustra in Greek and Latin literature. Perhaps the best-known attempts were those dates which placed Zarathustra in a very remote antiquity, 5,000 years before the Trojan war, 6,000 years before Xerxes' crossing, or 6,000 years before Plato's death.[13] These dates are generally interpreted as deriving from Persian theologians who had fitted Zarathustra into their millenary schemes. In the Iranian speculations on the subject, however, Zarathustra is never dated so early in the history of the world. We know that there were many versions of the millenary speculations and there were presumably several more that have not been recorded (Theopompus in Plutarch, *De Iside* 47, is an example). The suggestion that the particular dating of Zarathustra 6,000 years before the crossing of Xerxes was a piece of priestly propaganda (announcing the final battle marking the beginning of the victory of good) is an attractive one, even if it cannot be proved.[14]

This same date, found in Diogenes Laertius 1.2, however, has given rise to many other speculations, which must be mentioned here, if only for the sake of completeness. The problem is that the reading 6,000 is found in most editions, but that there are manuscript variants which read 600 rather than 6,000. If one takes this number seriously, one would arrive at a date for Zarathustra 600 years before 480 BCE, that is in 1080 BCE. Humbach has argued that, since 600 is the *lectio difficilior*, this reading should be accepted; its remarkable coincidence with the philological guess at Zarathustra's date may then not be fortuitous.[15] These suggestions have come under massive attack from Gershevitch, who, however, does not defend the reading 6,000, but suggests an emendation to *60, which would date Zarathustra in the sixth century BCE, the date that he defends.[16] Historicising such an uncertain date in the face of the massive evidence for millenary datings of Zarathustra raises more problems than it solves. For the reading of the date as 600, one could not possibly imagine how this would have been remembered; the unsupported reading of 60 brings about the familiar problems of the total silence on Zarathustra in all other sources pertaining to that time. The dating "6,000 years before Xerxes' crossing" remains to be preferred.

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[13] Hermodorus and Xanthus in Diogenes Laertius 1.2; Eudoxus in Pliny, *Natural History* 30.2.3; for an overview, cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 5-23; Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', *passim*, with many references.

[14] Thus Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', 191-195.

[15] Humbach, *Gāthās* I, 24-27.

[16] Gershevitch, 'Approaches', 6-15.

The Greeks also had a different date for Zoroaster, because some of them made him a contemporary of Pythagoras, thus dating him in the sixth century BCE.[17] Similar strategies were applied by Jewish authors, who identified Zoroaster with, for example, Ezekiel and thus also gave him a date in the sixth century BCE.[18] The sixth-century date of Zoroaster was once commonly adopted by most scholars in Zoroastrian studies, but it has been abandoned almost completely in favour of a much earlier date.[19] Yet other attempts at dating may be seen in the authors who present Zoroaster as the son of the Assyrian queen Semiramis.[20]

As to the land where Zoroaster lived, there are also many different traditions in classical literature. Most authors consider him a Persian, or sometimes a Mede.[21] A single tradition makes him a Greek (*Scholia in Platonis Alcibiadem* 1.122A), whereas Ctesias makes him a Bactrian king.[22] The only reliable tradition that can be found is the passage, possibly from Hecataeus of Abdera, in Diodorus Siculus 1.94.2, which connects Zathraustes with the Ariani. This mirrors the Avestan (and later Zoroastrian) idea of Zarathustra living in Airyana Vaējah and proclaiming his message to "the Aryans."[23]

The life of Zarathustra is the subject of myth, not only in the Greek and Latin references to him, but also in the Zoroastrian traditions themselves.[24] The Greek and Iranian myths on Zoroaster's life only rarely correspond. At least one traditional element of Zarathustra's legend has been preserved in classical literature: that he was the only mortal to laugh at birth, instead of crying. This belongs to the most common features of the Zoroastrian legends of Zarathustra,[25] and has also been recorded by Pliny and Augustine.[26] Pliny adds many other details concerning Zoroaster's life, which appear to be peculiar to him, for instance that Zoroaster's brain was so active that it shook away a hand that was placed on his head (*Natural History* 7.16.72). This cannot be found in the Iranian traditions, which attribute to Zoroaster all kinds of other miracles (and may not have thought of the brain as the seat of thought).[27]

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[17] Kingsley, 'Greek Origin', *passim*.

[18] Kingsley, 'Greek Origin', 256-258.

[19] Cf. A.Sh. Shahbazi, 'The "Traditional Date of Zoroaster" explained', *BSOAS* 40 (1977), 25-35. For a recent defense of the traditional date, cf. Gershevitch, 'Approaches to Zoroaster's Gathas', *passim*.

[20] This tradition may be attributed to Ctesias. Cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 8-10; for Semiramis and her legends (omitting the connections with Zoroaster), cf. A.M.G. Capomacchia, *Semiramis. Una femminilità ribaltata* (Storia delle Religioni 4), Roma 1986.

[21] For these texts, cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 23-25.

[22] Arnobius, *Adversus Gentes* 1.52, for which cf. M.J. Edwards, 'How many Zoroasters?', *VigChrist* 42 (1988), 282-289.

[23] For references, cf. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran* 109-112.

[24] For an overview, cf. Jackson, *Zoroaster*; Molé, *Légende de Zoroastre*. The most complete biography of the prophet is the (late) *Zarātoštnāmeh*.

A tradition with a somewhat wider spread concerned the withdrawal of Zarathustra from the world. Pliny writes that Zoroaster had lived for twenty years in the desert, eating nothing but cheese.[28] Dio Chrysostomus (*Oratio* 36.40-41) writes that Zoroaster withdrew from the world, in quest of wisdom and justice, and lived on a mountain. The mountain was consumed by fire, and the king and the Persians came to worship the deity; the man (Zoroaster) came out of the fire unscathed and taught them the religion and the rituals, thus establishing the religion of the Magi. The scholiast to Pseudo-Plato's *Alcibiades* 1.121E writes that Zoroaster fell silent when he was seven and did not speak again until he had reached the age of thirty, at which age he explained the entire philosophy to the king. Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.33) writes that Zoroaster withdrew to the solitude of a forest, where he was instructed by the Indian Brahmans.[29] Several of these elements recall characteristic aspects of (neo-)Pythagoraean life and the life of Pythagoras himself: Pythagoras is said to have ordered silence to his pupils, he went to be taught by Oriental sages and Pythagoraean students withdrew from the inhabited world as part of their training.[30]

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[25] *Dk*. 7.3.2; *WZ* 8.15-16; *ZN* 186-189.

[26] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.16.72; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 21.14.

[27] The second miracle, for instance, concerns the sorcerer Dūrāsrūn, who intends to kill the baby Zarathustra, but whose hand (holding a dagger) withers on the spot: *ZN* 201-219.

[28] *Natural History* 11.42.242.

[29] This tradition is interesting in itself, even if it is of unknown background; the combination of religious instruction, forests and Brahmans, recalls the Vedic *Āraṇyaka*-literature, the so-called "forest books" which contain esoteric speculations on the meaning of ritual. For an introduction to this literature, cf. J. Gonda, *Vedic Literature*, Wiesbaden 1975, 423-432.

[30] Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*, 30-31.

In the Iranian traditions, there is some uncertainty about the period between the early childhood of Zoroaster and the moment of the revelation. According to some traditions, he was taken into custody by a teacher; according to others, he remained at home, discussing with sorcerers and doing good works.[31] Most sources agree upon one fact, however: Zarathustra received his revelation when he was thirty.

The story of the burning mountain in Dio's oration recalls a fairly widespread legend attached to Zoroaster which involves celestial fire and in all likelihood is a Western etiological myth concerning the origin of the fire-cult.[32] The story is known in various permutations; in some versions, it is the Western legend of Zoroaster's death. The story that Zarathustra was aflame with heavenly fire can be found for the first time in Dio's oration. In contrast with most other treatments of this theme, however, Dio stresses that the fire did not consume Zoroaster, but that he came out of it unscathed. The legendary biography of Zarathustra reports a similar miracle, but this takes place in Zarathustra's earliest childhood: wicked persons repeatedly attempt to kill him, but never succeed. One of their attempts concerns a huge fire into which Zarathustra is thrown. No harm comes to him from the fire, however, and he is saved (*Dk*. 7.3.9-10; *WZ* 10.8; *ZN* 220-237).

Diodorus Siculus and a scholiast to the pseudo-Platonic *Greater Alcibiades* are the only authorities to mention another important part of Zoroaster's life: the meeting with Vohu Manah. Diodorus Siculus 1.94.2, writes that among the Aryans Zathraustes claimed that he had received the laws from the Good Daimon (ἀγαθὸς δαίμων). The scholiast to the *Greater Alcibiades* 1.122A, adds to this that the equivalent of the Good Spirit is ἐπιτυχὲς νόημα, "successful thought." These two passages undoubtedly reflect the Zoroastrian tradition that Zarathustra received the revelation through the mediation of Vohu Manah, "Good Thought."[33]

These are all traces of Iranian myths concerning Zoroaster preserved in Greek or Latin literature. The only traces that are certainly sound, are the name of Zoroaster, the legend that he laughed at birth, the information that he began to explain the tradition at the age of thirty and the remarkably correct story in Diodorus Siculus that Zathraustēs received the revelation from the Good Daimon. Less easy to understand, but having a genuine ring is the tradition that Zoroaster retreated from the world into the solitude of a forest or a mountain.

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[31] E.g. *ZN* 351-440.

[32] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, frg. B45 on pp. 50-54; and frgs. B51a-f on pp. 57-61. For a brief interpretation, cf. Beck, *HZ* III, 523 with n. 82.

[33] Cf. ch. 4.1.2.

Apart from these snippets from Zoroaster's traditional biography, there is a multitude of Western legends on Zoroaster's life. These legends were partly created by the identification of Zoroaster with heroes and men from different traditions (with Nimrod, Cham and Balaam or with the Platonic Er) and the legends attaching to them. Partly, it seems, these stories originate in etiological attempts to explain the fire-cult in Persia (for instance the story that Zoroaster was burned by heavenly fire and that his followers worship his ashes and bones). But these traditions are Western inventions, and need not be discussed here, in spite of their evident interest for a study of the reception of Zoroaster in ancient Graeco-Roman thought.

4. *Theology and doctrine*

1. *Apocalypticism and Eschatology*

The doctrine of the Renovation is of considerable importance in Zoroastrianism. From an early period of the faith onwards, the idea that the history of the world will come to an end with the final victory of good over evil, after which mankind will enjoy an eternal life of bliss in creation, has been recorded in Zoroastrian literature. The subject of eschatology and the related subject of apocalypticism in Zoroastrianism have been the object of long and bitter debates. The literature on the subject is vast and a *communis opinio* is not in sight. In order to keep the subject manageable, I shall keep very strictly to some of the demarcation criteria mentioned in the first chapter of the present book: the apocalyptic or eschatological ideas must be stated *explicitly* as deriving from an Iranian source or as having validity for Iranians. Since religious influence is not the subject of the present study, all materials containing ideas or imagery similar to what is known from Iran without making an explicit connection with Zoroaster, the Magi or the Persians is excluded from the present survey. Likewise excluded is the evidence from the *Oracles of Hystaspes* and related literature; these texts do not give descriptions of the beliefs and customs of the Persians or the Magi, but are eschatological visions of heterogeneous background, Jewish, Iranian, Christian and Greek. There are undoubtedly Iranian elements in the fragments from Hystaspes in the *Divine Institutions* of the Christian theologian Lactantius.[1] They are, however, difficult to single out in view of the many Jewish traditions that are also contained in these texts.[2] Our concern here is with those texts which claim to describe the beliefs of the Persians or their priests.[3]

If we apply the criteria strictly, surprisingly little remains. For practical purposes we may distinguish between personal and universal eschatology. Personal eschatology is concerned with the fate of the soul after death. Universal eschatology is concerned with the fate of mankind and of the world at the end of time. According to standard Zoroastrian doctrine, the soul of a deceased person remains with the body for three days and then goes to the Bridge of the Separator (*cinwad puhl*). There, the soul is judged according to its actions, words, and thoughts. On the basis of this judgment the soul is sent to heaven, cast into hell or confined in the place of mixture, awaiting—in all three cases—the resurrection, the final judgment, and the Renovation.

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[1] For a full discussion of this matter, cf. *HZ* III, 376-381, with references.

[2] Cf. particularly D. Flusser, 'Hystaspes and John of Patmos', in Shaked & Netzer (eds.), *Irano-Judaica* I (1982), 12-75 (repr. in D. Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, Jerusalem 1988, 390-453).

[3] This is not to deny the validity of an inventory of mutual interests, such as presented in *HZ* III, 371-456 and *passim*, or the possibility of influences (either way) between Judaeo-Christian and Zoroastrian traditions. That subject belongs to a category of investigation with which the present study is not concerned.

When the time of the Renovation comes near, mankind will stop eating and reproducing. There will be a resurrection of all persons, followed by a final judgment that will be carried out by means of a fiery river of molten metal, that will burn all that is evil. The fate of the wicked is explained differently by different authorities: according to most texts, evil will be burnt away from the evil persons, and they will be saved. According to some other passages, the evil persons will be destroyed by the fiery flood.[4]

In the realm of individual eschatology, only a few references can be found. These are mainly confined to the Christian author Agathias, from whom one may expect some understanding of the Iranian beliefs on this subject, because they are structurally similar to Jewish and Christian ideas. The pagan Greek conceptions of the fate of the soul after death[5] give little reason to suppose that Greek authors would be capable of accurately representing the Iranian ideas on the fate of the soul. The traces of the Zoroastrian conceptions in pagan Greek literature are all dubious. We may discard Aeschylus' representation of the ghost of the deceased Darius as a Greek invention.[6] The moving farewell speech of Cyrus in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* 8.7.17-28 is more difficult to interpret. This is one of the typical cases, where one can detect all sorts of Zoroastrian resonances which may yet be entirely unfounded. Cyrus speculates on the fate of the soul and sketches two options: either the soul perishes with the body or it is immortal and will reside with the gods. Cyrus quite clearly stresses his belief in the immortality of the soul and orders to "Invite [...] all the Persians and our allies to my burial, to joy with me in that I shall henceforth be in security such that no evil can ever again come nigh me, whether I shall be in the divine presence or whether I shall no longer have any being" (*Cyropaedia* 8.7.27, trl. W. Miller, LCL). Some of the aspects of the afterlife recall certain expressions of Zoroastrianism (especially the absence of evil in the divine presence). By and large, however, the genre of the farewell speech and the contents of Cyrus' words (mirroring the death of Socrates) appear to be Xenophon's invention.[7]

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[4] Contrast, for example, *PhlRDd* 32.5 and 48.70.

[5] For which, cf. Bremmer, *Early Greek Concept*, 70-124.

[6] For references, cf. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 89-90.

The only author to make a clear reference to the individual fate of the soul after death is Agathias, who records that the relatives of a deceased gauge from the swiftness with which the corpse is devoured what the fate of his soul will be, whether—Agathias writes—the deceased will be blessed or will not share in the best existence.[8] Agathias thus shows two possible destinations for a deceased person: he or she can either have a soul that is wicked and doomed, in which case he is given over to the power of evil, is considered truly dead and does not share in the higher life; or he or she can have a soul that is "virtuous and godlike and destined for the dwelling of the power of good."[9] These are remarkably precise destinations, which require a careful comparison with the Zoroastrian speculations. That the soul of the evil person is given over to the power of evil, corresponds to the idea of the soul being pushed into hell, there to endure a life in misery.[10] In his misery, the soul is aware of the fact that his actions, words and thoughts in life have caused him to be confined to hell, and as a consequence he continually longs for good deeds. Those in heaven, on the other hand, enjoy themselves in the presence of Ohrmazd, whose radiance they behold. Their souls are considered righteous and immortal, and they remain in heaven until the Renovation.

The subject of universal eschatology is better attested in Classical literature. The earliest reference to the end of time, the final defeat of the evil powers, the resurrection and the renovation, is attributed to Theopompus, who is quoted by three different authors as authority for three different versions of the final moment. In Plutarch, *De Iside* 47, Theopompus is invoked as authority for an otherwise unattested millenary scheme: Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu each reign for 3,000 years; then they fight against each other for another 3,000 years. After this battle, Angra Mainyu will be defeated, and mankind will be blessed (εὐδαίμων). Their bliss will be evident from two qualities observable in mankind: they will no longer eat, and they will not cast a shadow. The absence of food is well attested in Zoroastrian traditions concerned with the Renovation; it actually already precedes and thus predicts the Renovation.[11] The absence of shadow is not as well attested, but is not unknown either.[12] It may refer to a spiritual resurrection, as opposed to a resurrection in a material body, which is the best known tradition in Zoroastrian literature. Plutarch does not refer otherwise to the resurrection at all.

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[7] Thus D. Gera, *Xenophon's* Cyropaedia. *Style, Genre, and Literary Technique*, Oxford 1993, 115-131; but cf. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'The Death of Cyrus. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* as a Source for Iranian History', in: *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* (AI 25), Leiden 1985, 459-471, for a different perspective.

[8] Agathias, *Historiae* 2.23; cf. ch. 3.5.

[9] Cf. Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sassanians', 79.

[10] Thus, e.g. *PhlRDd* 23; *DD* 16-20; 31-32; 35 etc.

This is different in the case of the two other authorities invoking Theopompus for Iranian eschatology. Diogenes Laertius (1.9) attributes to Theopompus "that according to the Magi, men shall live again and be immortal and that everything knows permanence through their invocations. This Eudemus of Rhodes also relates." Aeneas of Gaza writes: "And Zoroaster predicts that there will be a time in which there will be a resurrection of all the dead."[13]

He attributes this information to Theopompus. The two passages may well derive from a common source, but they betray the diction and the interests of the authors responsible for the quotations. Diogenes Laertius uses for the resurrection a term that means "come back to life" and is used, for instance, to refer to the incarnations of Epimenides.[14] It stresses the return of the life-force rather than the resurrection of the deceased body. Aeneas, by contrast, uses one of the regular terms from Christian literature for the resurrection of the dead body. It is not difficult to see how Diogenes Laertius and Aeneas have reinterpreted whatever it was that Theopompus had written in terms acceptable from their own philosophical or religious points of view. If we combine this information with the information from Plutarch, we should therefore be very cautious; nevertheless, it seems likely that Theopompus referred to a situation at the end of time, in which the dead would rise again or would come back to life. If Plutarch's extract from Theopompus is reliable, Theopompus would have understood this resurrection as a taking place in a spiritual body.

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[11] *GBd*. 34.1-3; *DD*. 34.3.

[12] Cf. De Jong, 'Shadow and Resurrection', *passim*.

[13] M.E. Colonna, *Eneo di Gaza. Teofrasto*, Napoli 1958, p. 64.8-10.

[14] As was stressed by J.N. Bremmer, 'The Resurrection between Zarathustra and Jonathan Z. Smith', *NTT* 50 (1996), 89-107, p. 99.

The passage from Theopompus (and Eudemus) as reported in Diogenes Laertius continues by stating that after the resurrection, men will be immortal, "and everything will know permanence through their invocations." Immortality is one of the key terms in early descriptions of the resurrection (Yt. 19.11). The phrase on the permanence of things caused by their invocations is difficult to understand in any case, and particularly in view of the nature of Zoroastrian eschatological ideas.[15] The only possible connection could be with the performance of the *Yasna* which will be recited at the beginning of the final battle and in itself guarantees the victory of good over evil, the destruction of evil.

On the basis of his readings in other—but unnamed—authorities, Plutarch has also preserved a different version of Zoroastrian eschatology. Having described the origin of the state of mixture, he proceeds (*De Iside* 47) to describe the state of separation: "There will come the destined time when Areimanius, the bringer of plague and famine, must needs be utterly destroyed and obliterated by these. The earth shall be flat and level and one way of life and one government shall arise of all men, who shall be happy and speak the same language." (trl. Griffiths)

The concept of a fixed time is not unknown from Zoroastrian sources, but usually referred to in different terms, such as *frašgird*, "the Renovation" or *tan ī pasēn*, "the final body" (cf. ch. 3.3.3). The description of Areimanios as bringing plague and famine has a Greek origin,[16] even though most Iranians would indeed attribute these disasters to the working of the evil spirit. The situation of the world after the renovation is presented from a physical and a socio-political point of view. The earth will become flat; mountains will disappear. This is confirmed by, for instance, *GBd*. 34.33.[17] Mankind will exist in a single life and a single society of all blessed men, who also speak the same language.[18] Exact Iranian parallels to this eschatological vision are not easy to find. One could at least point to the fact that Ohrmazd is presented as the king of the world after the renovation (he takes his seat on the throne, *WZ* 35.31), and that all will loudly confess their faith in Ohrmazd (*WZ* 35.34). Through the destruction of evil, a permanent state of bliss will arrive.

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[15] For attempts at interpretation, cf. Moulton, *EZ*, 416-417; Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 67-70; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, 129-131.

[16] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 77, n. 18.

[17] Cf. B. Lincoln, '"The Earth becomes Flat": a Study of Apocalyptic Imagery', *Comp Stud Soc Hist*. 25 (1983), 136-153 (repr. in: *id*., *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, New York 1989, 38-50; 180-182).

In a fragment from the astrologer and magus Nigidius Figulus, another reference to Iranian eschatology may have been preserved, but it is difficult to interpret. Nigidius writes: "Some, among them Orpheus, divide the gods and their generations in times and ages: the first reign was that of Saturnus, then that of Jupiter, then that associated with Neptune, then that of Pluto; some even say, like the Magi, that there will be a reign of Apollo. It remains to be seen whether they do not mean by this the conflagration or, as it is called, the *ecpyrosis*."[19] The passage is one of two Classical passages that attribute the doctrine of the *ecpyrosis*, the final conflagration of the world,[20] to the Magi. The other passage can be found in the "hymns of the Magi" in Dio Chrysostomus' *Oration* 36.[21] In Dio's version of the conflagration, however, such an event occurs several times, resulting each time in a new process leading to a new cosmos. This is Stoic philosophy, and most definitely not Iranian theology. In Zoroastrianism, the conflagration of the world occurs only once; it is in fact the ultimate goal of existence, for it will purify the world from all evil. Nigidius Figulus' version of the doctrine of the Magi may therefore be closer to the ideas of the Magi on the conflagration. There are evident problems as well, especially with respect to the attribution of the final reign to Apollo, who can be no other than Mithra, if an Iranian divinity is intended at all. It is true that Mithra has an important place in certain versions of Zoroastrian eschatology,[22] but most eschatological passages stress that it is

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[18] This theme is discussed at length by Cerutti, *Antropologia e apocalittica*, 45-62.

[19] Nigidius Figulus frg. 67 Swoboda. For this author and his interest in all varieties of magic, cf. A. Della Casa, *Nigidio Figulo*, Roma 1962, 101-138; D. Liuzzi, *Nigidio Figulo. "Astrologo e Mago"*, Lecce 1983. For the translation of the passage (commenting on *ardor* and on the construction *videndum est...ne*), cf. Cumont, 'Fin du monde', 44, n. 2.

[20] For which, cf. Van der Horst, '"The Elements will be Dissolved with Fire".'

[21] For which, cf. *HZ* III, 539-548.

[22] *MX* 8.13-15; *ZBY* 7.27-30 etc. Cf. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša*, 136-142.

Ohrmazd who will take command. In fact, the judging of souls before the end of time is the domain of Mihr, Srōš and Rašn, but at the end of time this function will be taken over by Ohrmazd himself (*DD*. 13.2-3).

Cumont has, moreover, drawn attention to the references in the same source (the commentary of Servius Grammaticus on Virgil) which invoke the authority of the Cymean Sibyl who is said to have predicted that the final age of the world will be under the sovereignty of the Sun.[23] This connects the passage with the common Hellenistic speculations on ages of the world.[24] Such speculations can also be found in Zoroastrian texts,[25] but these texts never attribute the final age to the Sun or to Mithra.[26] This leads to evident problems in the interpretation of Nigidius' account: at best, it would seem to be a hybrid representation of Zoroastrian ideas—the final and decisive conflagration—with common Hellenistic speculations—the reign of Apollo or the Sun as the last age of the world. Whether this hybrid was one current among Hellenised Zoroastrians (thus Cumont and partly Boyce) remains unclear.

2. *Zurvanism*

There are few subjects in the history of the study of Zoroastrianism that have changed as dramatically as Zurvanism. Some of the developments in the appreciation of Zurvanism were treated in ch. 2.5. Having been hailed once as the most important heresy within Zoroastrianism, and one of the main contributing factors to the formation of Gnosticism in general and Manichaeism in particular, it has steadily declined in importance, almost to the point of being denied a proper existence as an organised system.

The foreign reports on the religion of the Persians (especially the Syriac, Armenian and Arabic reports) give a version of the cosmogony that differs considerably from the versions known from the Zoroastrian texts themselves.[27] The absence of this myth from the Zoroastrian texts was interpreted as the result of a process of redaction which had wilfully purged all references to Zurvan and Zurvanism from the Zoroastrian texts.[28] Nevertheless, one could reasonably define what had been suppressed and Zurvanism was found to have left traces throughout the Pahlavi books. Thus, all references containing words such as "unlimited time", "space" and "fate" were interpreted as Zurvanite passages. All misogynist passages were also taken to be Zurvanite; all tetrads (including the four elements) were taken as referring to the fourfold deity Zurvan.[29] Through this procedure, an intricate and highly evolved doctrine was reconstructed, which proceeded from what is virtually the only well attested aspect of Zurvanism: the myth of Zurvan.

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[23] 'Fin du monde', 44-45.

[24] Cf. D. Flusser, 'The four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel', *IOS* 2 (1972), 148-175. For a discussion of the Servius-passage, cf. *ibid.*, 163-164.

[25] For an overview, cf. *HZ* III, 383-389.

[26] Cumont's attempts ('Fin du monde', *passim*) to reconstruct a Magusaean eschatology in which this would be the decisive element is based precisely on Dio and Nigidius Figulus, as well as on some questionable interpretations of Mithraic monuments. He attributes this doctrine to a permutation of Zoroastrian, Babylonian and Stoic ideas, which eventually led to Mithraism. On this theory, cf. ch. 1.5, and Beck, *HZ* III, 539-550; *id.*, 'Mithraism since Franz Cumont', 2063-2069.

According to this myth, preserved in detail in Armenian and Syriac,[30] in the beginning there was only Zurvan, the god of time. He wanted to have a son. In order to conceive a son, he performed sacrifices for 1,000 years. He doubted whether his sacrifices were of any use, and consequently Ohrmazd and Ahreman came into being in his womb, Ohrmazd on account of his sacrifices, Ahreman on account of his doubt. When he became conscious of the fact that he had conceived two children, he promised to grant the firstborn sovereignty over the world. Ohrmazd knew of this promise and told it to Ahreman, who immediately pierced the womb of his father and came before Zurvan. Zurvan asked him who he was, and Ahreman replied: "I am your son (Ohrmazd)." Zurvan refused to accept this, because his son was luminous and fragrant, whereas Ahreman was dark and stinking. Then Ohrmazd was born and came before his father. Zurvan recognised him as Ohrmazd and handed him the *barsom*, the symbol of spiritual sovereignty. He blessed Ohrmazd. Then Ahreman said: "Did you not promise to grant sovereignty to the firstborn?" Zurvan granted Ahreman sovereignty over the world for 9,000 years, but after the 9,000 years, Ohrmazd will rule. From this stage of the myth onwards, the "normal" Zoroastrian version is observed.

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[27] Cf. Zaehner, *Zurvan, passim*; for earlier work, cf. particularly H.S. Nyberg, 'Questions de cosmogonie et de cosmologie mazdéennes', *JA* 214 (1929), 193-310; 219 (1931), 1-134; 193-244 (= *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg IV* (*AI* 7), Teheran-Liège 1975, 75-378).

[28] Opinions have differed with regard to the question whether Zurvanite materials could have been found in the Avestan texts. Zaehner does not seem to consider this possible—for he thinks Zurvanism was a Western Iranian tradition—but Widengren is one of the main advocates of the idea that (lost) parts of the Avesta were Zurvanite in character; for the procedure of recovering these parts, cf. G. Widengren, 'Primordial Man and Prostitute: a Zervanite Myth in the Sassanid Avesta', in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, Jerusalem 1967, 227-234 (against which, De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', *passim*).

[29] For a description of this procedure, cf. Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 226-227.

[30] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419-429.

From this myth, central notions of the Zurvanite version of Zoroastrianism were extracted. The name of the deity itself, Av. *zruuan-*, "time," provided one of the main clues: Zurvanism posited an original deity of time who was the ultimate source of being and who gave rise to the twin spirits. In Zoroastrian literature, a distinction is made between "boundless time" (Av. *zruuan-akarana-*; MP *zamān ī akanārag*) and "time of the long dominion" (Av. *zruuan- darəγō.*x^{v}*aδāta-*; MP *zurvān ī dagrand-xwadāy*). These concepts are used to distinguish between the infinite time of the divine realm and the appointed period during which the battle between the spirits takes place. There are parallels to these notions in Jewish and in Hellenistic literature.[31] The concept of infinite time (ἄπειϱος αἰών or χϱόνος ἄπειϱος) also appears in the inscriptions of Antiochus I of Commagene. These texts—which are at least partly inspired by an Iranian religion—were therefore much used in the reconstruction of the transmission of Zurvanite ideas to the Hellenistic world. On the basis of these inscriptions and similar speculations, virtually every Greek reference to the word αἰών and all philosophical elaborations of time-concepts were claimed to derive from Zurvanism.[32] Similarly, because there are texts, where Zurvan is interpreted as "fate" and

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[31] Cf. especially S. Pines, 'Eschatology and the Conception of Time in the Slavonic Book of Enoch', in: R.J.Z. Werblowsky & C.J. Bleeker (eds.), *Types of Redemption* (SHR/Numen Suppl. 18), Leiden 1970, 72-87.

[32] Cf., for instance, H. Junker, 'Über iranische Quellen der hellenistischen Aion-vorstellung', *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* 1921-1922, 125-178; W. Bousset, 'Der Gott Aion', in *idem*, *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (ed. by A.F. Verheule, Suppl.Nov.Test. 50), Leiden 1979, 192-230; R. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, Bonn 1921, 151-250. Contrast these approaches with A.J. Festugière, *Rev.Herm.Trism.* IV, 146-149 and A.D. Nock, 'A Vision of Mandulis Aion', *HThR* 27 (1934), 53-104, repr. in *Essays*, 357-400. For the situation, and the meaning of the words, in Commagene, cf. Waldmann, *Mazdaismus*, 184-191; *HZ* III, 332-334.

"glory,"[33] it was argued that the concept of fate was a Zurvanite one, alien to Zoroastrianism. Every passage concerning fate therefore had to be Zurvanite, and Zurvanism emerged as a "fatalistic" reinterpretation of Zoroastrianism.[34] The argument that Zurvanites would be inclined to perform sacrifices to the Evil Spirit, because they viewed the two spirits as equals,[35] was also based on the myth, but did not gain wide acceptance.[36]

Some important facts remain: first of all, the Manichaeans used the name of Zurvan to translate their Father of Greatness.[37] In a Byzantine *anathema* the Manichaean Father of Greatness is called ὁ τετραπρόσωπος πατὴρ τοῦ μεγέθους, "the four-faced Father of Greatness."[38] Tetrads are commonly encountered in other passages where Zurvan's name is mentioned. Similarly, the Buddhist Soghdians used the name Zurvan to translate the name Brahma, a usage that gained currency in Turkic and Mongolian as well.[39] This strongly suggests a form of Zoroastrianism in the Sasanian period, in which Zurvan was commonly seen as the original divine being. Time as the supreme creator god is expressly discussed in the Persian treatise known as the *Second ʿUlamā-yi Islām*.[40]

On the other hand, the Zoroastrian texts have not devoted a single line of polemic against Zurvanism.[41] The much-discussed passage *DkM*. 829.1-5, where the doctrine that Ohrmazd and Ahreman are brothers from one womb is condemned,[42] has parallels in Manichaean literature.[43] This is interesting evidence for the existence of such an idea in varieties of Zoroastrian doctrine, but it is not conclusive evidence for the existence of an independent Zurvanite sect. Such evidence, as a matter of fact, is lacking. There is evidence for the myth of Zurvan, and for an exalted position of Zurvan in varieties of Zoroastrian theology. Given the total silence of Zoroastrian literature—which devotes considerable space to the defence of traditions against perceived heretics—on a heresy called Zurvanism, however, we can quote the verdict of Sh. Shaked on Zurvanism without reservation: "Zurvanism as an organized religious system is a scholarly invention which lacks historical substance."[44]

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[33] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 59; 65; 248-264.

[34] An idea upheld particularly by Boyce, *HZ* II, 234-235.

[35] Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 76.

[36] The surprising exception being Boyce, *HZ* II, 235: "An orthodox Zoroastrian would hardly have dignified Anra Mainyu with an appellation which could be rendered as 'god'; but Zurvanites could not deny the Hostile Spirit this honour, since he was held by them to be of the same begetting and birth as Ahuramazda." Cf. ch. 3.3.3.

[37] For references, cf. Sundermann, 'Namen von Göttern', 101, nr. 3/1.

[38] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 54.

[39] Uyghur *äzrua*; Mongolian *Esrua*, both from Sgd *ʾzrw*'. Cf. A. von Gabain, 'Irano-Turkish Relations in the Late Sasanian Period', CHI III, 613-624, pp. 617-618. For the Mongolian name, cf. W. Heissig in G. Tucci & W. Heissig, *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei*, Berlin 1970, 353.

[40] *PersRiv* 449-457, p. 450: "Except Time all other things have been created and Time is the Creator."

[41] Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 226 and *passim*.

[42] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 429-431.

[43] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 431-432.

In another publication, I have tried to show the deplorable effects of attributing to Zurvanism (and other constructed traditions) certain developments which may be thought to be unexpected in a rigid view of Zoroastrian doctrine, in that case associated with negative views on women.[45] Similar strategies have been applied in the theories concerning time, and particularly in the recognition of divine tetrads. Because these were *a priori* attributed to Zurvanism, surprisingly little work has been devoted to Zoroastrian concepts of time and space. And yet it is undeniable that a great number of Zoroastrian texts were devoted to these subjects. The contents of these texts are frequently of a philosophical nature, discussing matters of infinity, primal matter and the technicalities behind mixtures of good and evil. We meet some of these traditions in the Classical texts as well.

We can dismiss certain texts that have been adduced as evidence for Zurvanism right from the start. Plutarch's *De Iside* 46-47 was considered to be a Zurvanite text by Benveniste, but on questionable grounds.[46] The passage from Theopompus which Plutarch quotes (*De Iside* 47) has also been interpreted as Zurvanite, because Theopompus claims that the Evil spirit rules over the cosmos for a period of 3,000 years. This has been connected with the Zurvanite myth according to which Ahreman is sovereign over the world, but there is no attested myth (Zurvanite or other) that accords a period of 3,000 years to Ahreman.

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[44] Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 228; cf. also p. 232: "There never were any Zurvanite heretics because the adherents of Zurvan as supreme god were simply Zoroastrians. This is how they must have regarded themselves, and it was in this manner that they were regarded by other Zoroastrians."

[45] De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', *passim*.

[46] Cf. ch. 3.3.3.

We must also exclude from the discussion the texts of Hippolytus and of Basil adduced by Zaehner.[47] There is nothing Zurvanite, indeed hardly anything Iranian, to be discovered in Hippolytus' rendering of the doctrine of Zaratas in *Elenchus* 1.2.12-14.[48] Hippolytus mentions that Zaratas taught that there were two principles: a male principle, the elements of which are warm, dry, light and swift; and a female principle (associated with darkness), the elements of which are cold, moist, heavy and slow. Zaehner argued that Zurvanites considered the female principle, and women altogether, to belong to the evil creation. One of his main arguments was the fact that water was associated with evil; his main source for this was the passage from Hippolytus.[49]

Two objections present themselves, however: the many Pahlavi texts that speak of the substances of the cosmos (light-dark; heavy-light; moist-dry etc.) are thought to be influenced by Greek speculations.[50] These same Pahlavi speculations, moreover, unequivocally attribute the moist substance to the good creation, and the dry substance to the evil creation: there is not a trace of the association between women, water, and evil in any variety of Zoroastrianism.[51] Consequently, there is nothing to suggest that Hippolytus can be used for the reconstruction of Zurvanite doctrine.

Basil mentions the fact that the Magusaeans claim that their ancestor is a certain "Zarnouas." This is frequently interpreted as a garbled form of Zurvan (with intrusive -n-), but this is uncertain. The idea of a god being the ancestor of a race is foreign to most Iranian traditions, and the parallel from Armenian adduced by Zaehner—where Zurvan is said to be the "ancestor" of one of the three races of the world—is a translation from the *Oracula Sibyllina* (from Gk Kronos) and has no connection with Iranian speculations.[52] It seems that no conclusions can be drawn from this passage for the teachings or importance of Zurvanism.

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[47] Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 1.2.12-13; Basil, *Epistle* 258.4; in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 447-449.

[48] For which, cf. Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 202-203; 281-282; Kingsley, 'Greek Origin', *passim*; briefly, De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 32-33.

[49] Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 74-75.

[50] Bailey, *ZorProb*, 87-90; C. Colpe, 'Die griechische, die synkretistische und die iranische Lehre von der kosmischen Mischung', *Or.Suec.* 27-28 (1978-1979), 132-147.

[51] Cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 32-33.

[52] Cf. ch. 4.7.2.

This leaves us with two passages where we encounter Zurvanite ideas: Damascius, *Dubitationes et solutiones* 125bis and a passage from Theodore of Mopsuestia's books *On the Magian Religion in Persia* in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 81. Damascius, an author from the late fifth or early sixth century, writes the following: "Of the Magi and the entire Aryan race,[53] as Eudemus also writes, some call the whole of that which is intelligible and unified[54] Place, and others Time; from this either a good god and an evil demon have separated, or light and darkness before these,[55] as some say. However this may be, they also posit, after the undifferentiated nature, the double series of higher beings, of which Oromasdes governs one and Areimanios the other."[56]

The reason why this passage is virtually always interpreted as evidence for the existence, or even the origin, of Zurvanism in the late Achaemenian period, is the appellation of the original being as Time (χϱόνος) and Place (τόπος). The passage is attributed to Eudemus of Rhodes and takes us back, therefore to the late Achaemenian period.[57]

The reference to "time" and "place" is usually connected with the Avestan deities Zurvan, the god of Time and Thwāša, the god of Space.[58] They are abstracts denoting the concept of "eternal time" and "endless space," and they have been interpreted as constituting the framework of creation.[59] In later texts, Time and Place are sometimes said to be coeternal with the two spirits. All activities of the two spirits take place in time and in space. An example of such a tradition is the first chapter of the *Bundahišn*:

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[53] The Greek words πᾶν τὸ ἄϱειον γένος can also mean "the entire warlike race," but since Damascius refers to Eudemus, it is more likely that he refers to the Persians or the Iranians with a term that was antiquated in his time. Cf. LSJ s.v. ῎Αϱιοι. The concept of "aryanism" is treated at length in Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, *passim*.

[54] The word Damascius uses, τὸ ἡνωμένον, "that which is unified," is in his writings equivalent to τὸ ὄν, "Being." Cf. LSJ, s.v. ἑνόω; Damascius, *De principiis* 20: "And what we call "the unified", that is what the philosophers call "being" [...] (καὶ ὅπεϱ λέγομεν ἡνωμένον, ὃ δὲ ὄν οἱ σοφοὶ κεκλήκασιν [...])."

[55] The (crucial) words πϱὸ τούτων are not translated by Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 230, or by Boyce, *HZ* II, 239.

[56] For the text and a crucial emendation, cf. L.G. Westerink & J. Combès, *Damascius. Traité des premiers principes 3: de la procession*, Paris 1991, *ad locum*.

[57] Cf. G. Gnoli, 'A Note on the Magi and Eudemus of Rhodes', in: *A Green Leaf. Papers in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen* (AI 28), Leiden 1988, 283-288.

[58] For whom, cf. Widengren, *Hochgottglaube*, 231-234.

[59] Shaked, 'Myth of Zurvan', 230-231.

between the two Spirits lay the Void. Some call the Void Way.[60] This chapter discusses matters of finite and infinite realities. The Void is the place where the finite and the infinite intermingle.

Thus, what Damascius reports has parallels in Zoroastrian writings, in the sense that these also work with concepts of Space and Time as the origin or framework of creation. Damascius reproduces two different systems: some say that from Space or Time the two spirits have separated; others say that before the two spirits, light and darkness came into being. Something similar is said by Plutarch, *De Iside* 47, who records that the two spirits are born or come into being from light and darkness respectively.

These versions of cosmogonical ideas clearly differ from the normative version of the Zoroastrian cosmogony. This is particularly clear from the idea that Ahura Mazdā is said not to be eternal, but to have been created. The fact that the primal unity is called "time" or "place" places these concepts in the context of Zurvanite ideas.

In the *Library* of Photius 81, a fragment from the books *On the Magian Religion in Persia* of Theodorus of Mopsuestia has been preserved which faithfully reproduces the Zurvanite myth: "And in the first book, he describes the abominable belief of the Persians, which Zaradēs introduced, the doctrine of Zourouam, whom he introduces as the origin of all, and whom he also calls Fate. And when he performed libations in order to give birth to Hormisdas, he became pregnant of him as well as of Satan."

This fragment reproduces the essentials of the myth of Zurvan. It is largely comparable with the versions of the myth as they are found in Syriac and Armenian sources.[61] It has been suggested, therefore, that the Syrian and Armenian authors writing about this myth came to know it from Theodorus, but this is nowadays considered unlikely.[62] That Zurvan was also referred to as "Fate" (*baxt*) is commonly reported in Armenian literature.[63]

Theodorus is therefore the only Greek author who unequivocally reports on Zurvanism. It is possible that Basil also mentions the name Zurvan, but this is uncertain. If so, this would confirm the evidence for the common Sasanian belief in Zurvan as the supreme original deity. The information given by Damascius is the clearest expression of Zurvanite ideas in Greek literature: a primal unity of time or place, from which dualities of light and darkness or of the two spirits have been distinguished. The fact that Damascius attributes these views to "the Magi and the entire Aryan race" already indicates that those who held these views did not consider themselves anything other than Zoroastrians. They may have been Zoroastrians of a particular school of thought and we may even refer to those as Zurvanites, as long as it is remembered that this distinction is an invented notion, not a historical reality.

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[60] For an interpretation of this passage, cf. Shaked, 'Mihr the Judge', 29-30.

[61] For which, cf. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419-429.

[62] Cf. L. van Rompay, 'Eznik de Kołb et Théodore de Mopsueste. A propos d'une hypothèse de Louis Mariès', *OLP* 15 (1984), 159-175.

[63] R. Ajello, 'Armeno "p'aṙk'", avestico "x^{v}arənah", in: A. Bausani & G. Scarcia (eds.), *Studi iranici. 17 saggi di iranisti Italiani* (= *īrān az dīdgāh-e xāvaršenāsān-e ītālīyā. hevdah goftār*), Roma 1977, 25-33.

3. *Khrafstra-killing*[64]

One of the most eye-catching elements of foreign descriptions of Zoroastrian practices is the practice of killing creatures thought to have been created by the Evil Spirit.[65] These creatures are called *khrafstra* (Avestan *xrafstra*,[66] Phl. *xrafstar*, MMP **prystr*), a word meaning originally "wild beast, predator" and used in this sense by Zarathustra himself.[67] In the Younger Avesta, however, it has already become a *terminus technicus* for a special class of creatures, created by the Evil Spirit, who continually strive to increase the worlds of evil and the killing of which is therefore not only a meritorious act, but even a sacred duty and often a means of atonement for grave sins.[68] The *khrafstras* predictably include insects and reptiles, but also some predators, especially felines.

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[64] Cf. *HZ* I, 90-91; 298-300, and the literature given below. Cf. also M. van Esbroeck, 'Les Č̣inḳa, les xrafstra et Loki', in: C. Paris (ed.), *Caucasologie et mythologie comparée. Actes du colloque international du CNRS. IVe Colloque de Caucasologie*, Paris 1992, 115-126.

[65] Also described by European travellers; cf. Firby, *European Travellers*, index s.v. 'Khrafstra'.

[66] For the word, cf. H.W. Bailey, 'A Range of Iranica', *W.B. Henning Memorial Volume*, London 1970, 20-36, pp. 25-28.

[67] Y. 34.9. The meaning 'Raubgesindel', the enemies of the young religion, as given by Bartholomae, *AirWb.*, 538 is to be deleted; Zarathustra obviously uses the word *xrafstra* in its original meaning (but in a figurative sense). Cf. Humbach, *Gathas* I, 140; II, 107.

[68] In Vd. 16.11-12, for instance, there is an indication of the proper way of cleansing a woman who suffers from an extraordinarily long menstruation, which consists among others of killing 200 corn-carrying ants if it is summer and other *xrafstras* if it is winter.

Instruments for the killing of these creatures (Av. *xrafstraγna-*, "*khrafstra*-killer"; MP *mārgan*, "snake-killer"),[69] belong to the priestly implements.

Notwithstanding the semantic difference of the word in the Gathas and in the Younger Avesta, the practice of *khrafstra*-killing is generally considered to be an ancient part of Zoroastrianism. In older treatments of the religion many other theories about the origin of *khrafstra*-killing can be found, attributing it to a postulated "Magian" layer of the religion,[70] or to a hypothetical North-West Iranian religion also found among the Magi.[71] These theories generally ascribe the practice of *khrafstra*-killing to a Magian perversion of the "pure" Zoroastrian faith.

At present, such explanations are no longer felt to be acceptable. As has been pointed out by Boyce and Grenet, the fact that in the Indian texts the killing of *khrafstras* is ascribed to the Iranian population (the Kambojas) shows that it is not typically North-Western Iranian, nor exclusively Magian.[72] It rather transpires that it is a genuine part of Zoroastrianism, influenced by the fundamental notion of the presence of the works of the evil spirit in creation.

The earliest witness to the killing of *khrafstras* is Herodotus, *Histories* 1.140. Herodotus contrasts the priests of Egypt with the Magi of the Persians. Whereas the Egyptian priests take great care not to kill any living creature, except for animals offered in sacrifice, "the Magi kill with their own hands all creatures except dog and man, and they make this the object of rivalry, killing alike ants, snakes, and the other creeping and flying creatures." This passage thus also shows that the Magi in Herodotus' time were Zoroastrians (contrary to earlier opinions).

The animals Herodotus singles out as the particular victims of the zeal of the Magi, are ants, snakes, creeping and flying animals. The ant (Av. *mauruui-/maoiri-*) is well known as a *khrafstra* in Zoroastrian literature. In the Avesta as well as in the Pahlavi books, it is frequently mentioned as a *khrafstra* and its killing is ordered. The hedgehog is specifically praised because it destroys so many ants.[73] The snake (Av. *aži-*) is perhaps the main representative of the *khrafstras*. Killing it removes great sins and pollution.[74] The other animals Herodotus mentions, "creeping and flying" animals, must refer to reptiles and winged insects, which are all categorised as evil creatures.

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[69] The former is mentioned in the Avesta, Vd. 14.8; 18.2, as a typical instrument of the priests. The latter is known from GBd. 27.27 and other passages; it is also worn by Mandaean priests (Mand. *margnā*): Drower, *Mandaeans*, 34-35 (and plate 2a); Rudolph, *Mandäer*, 33-37, also discussing the wide spread of the word in Semitic languages and (possibly) Gk. μάραγνα.

[70] Moulton, *EZ*, 398, n. 4: "It is purely Magian, alien alike from genuine Persian religion and from Zarathushtra's reform."

[71] Widengren, *Religionen*, 114: "Mit Recht ist hervorgehoben worden, daß die Vorschriften des Vendidad nicht die Begründung für das Verhalten der Magier gegenüber den *xrafstra* bilden, sondern daß diese Vorschriften sich dort finden, 'weil die Magier es so haben wollten'." (in the final quote, Widengren refers to Nyberg, *Religionen*, 338).

[72] *HZ* III, 129-130.

Of the other ancient authors to have mentioned the killing of *khrafstras*, Plutarch is the most interesting one. In three passages he mentions the custom of killing creatures of the evil spirit: *De Iside et Osiride* 46; *De Invidia et Odio* 3.537B; *Quaestiones Conviviales* 4.5.2.670D. In *De Iside*, Plutarch introduces the good and evil creatures in his broad outline of Persian dualism: the good spirit has created the good animals and plants, the evil spirit has created the evil animals and plants. Of the good animals, Plutarch mentions dogs, birds and hedgehogs, of the evil creatures only the mysterious animals called "water rat" (ἔνυδρος μῦς; for a discussion, cf. ch. 3.3.3). He also adds that the Persians celebrate him who has killed most of these animals.

Basically the same information can be found in the *Quaestiones Conviviales* 4.5.2. The participants in the table talks take up the question why the Jews do not eat pork. Callistratus, wanting to argue that the Jews do not eat pork because they have the greatest reverence for pigs, gives as an example the case of the Magi: "the Magi, followers of Zoroaster, have the greatest reverence for the hedgehog, but they hate the water rats, and consider him who kills most (of these) dear to the gods and blessed." This he then applies to the Jews: if the Jews had hated pigs, they would have killed them, like the Magi. Since they do not hate them, and are not allowed to kill them, it follows that they must hold them in particular reverence.

In *De Invidia et Odio*, the information is different. Plutarch there describes the fact that envy is found only among mankind. In listing the differences between hatred and envy, he gives examples of men hating animals: "The Magi of the Persians killed mice, because they hated them themselves, and (they thought that) their god despises the animal."

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[73] Vd. 14.5; 16.12; 18.73; *PhlRDd*. 21a5; *GBd*. 24.42 etc.

[74] Vd. 14.5; *PhlRDd*. 21a6-7; 21b2; *GBd*. 22.10 etc.

That the Persian Magi loathe mice or rats (the Greek μῦς, just as Phl. *mūš*, means both "mouse" and "rat") and kill them is correct. This is evident from the Avestan name of an evil witch (*pairikā-*), Muš (Y. 16.8; 68.8) and from later literature.[75] Plutarch of course gives a reductionist interpretation of the custom: the Magi hate mice themselves, and therefore think that their god hates them as well. This is obviously not how the Magi would have viewed these matters themselves. In Zoroastrian literature, the killing of *khrafstras* is a duty because they have been created by the evil spirit and are harmful to the good creation. This information is only given by Plutarch in *De Iside*, whereas in the other two passages he simply mentions the fact that these animals are hated, and therefore killed.

That the person who has killed most of the evil creatures is celebrated by his peers, seems to point to the existence of a festival or a contest, attested only in much later sources, during which people would go out and kill as many *khrafstras* as they could. Whoever had killed most won a prize.

The actual existence of such a festival is shown by Agathias, who mentions a festival called "the removal of evil" (τῶν κακῶν ἀναίϱεσις), which according to him is the greatest festival of all: "[At this festival] they kill a multitude of reptiles, and all other wild and desert-living animals and bring them to the Magi, as though as a sign of piety. In this way they think that they are doing what pleases the good god, but that they hurt and offend Arimanes." (*Histories* 2.24).[76] The name of the festival, "the removal of evil," probably is some sort of a translation of the festival that came to be known as NP *xarastar-košī*, "*khrafstra*-killing", known from the records of European travellers, as well as from living recollection of Iranian Zoroastrians.[77] It was possibly connected with the festival for Ārmaiti, the goddess associated with the earth. Bīrūnī simply mentions the festival of Isfandarmādh

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[75] E.g. SDB 43.9; cf. J.J. Modi, 'The Rat Problem and the Ancients', in: J.J. Modi, *Anthropological Papers*, Bombay 1911, 355-365.

[76] Note the categories of evil creatures: reptiles are all included among the *khrafstras*; the wild and desert-living creatures would include some of the most important *khrafstras*, such as the wolf and most felines. Zoroastrians have the greatest reverence for domesticated animals and for members of the canine family (of which they have a very broad definition; cf. Vd. 13).

[77] Firby, *European Travellers*, 52; Boyce, *Stronghold*, 202; *HZ* I, 299.

(Ārmaiti) as a festival for women (called *možd-gīrān*, "the taking of good tidings"), and as a festival during which special amulets were made to protect people from being hurt by evil creatures such as scorpions.[78]

A trace of a similar custom may have been preserved in Pseudo-Aristotle's *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* 27.832a. In this collection "about wonderful things heard", the author mentions the following: "It is said that when one goes from Susa to Media, there is an immense quantity of scorpions in the second stage. Therefore the king of the Persians, whenever he passed through, stayed there for three days, and ordered all his men to catch them. To him who had caught most, he gave a prize." The royal background of the passage should not blind us to the evident parallel of a prize awarded to the person who had killed most of the scorpions. Several districts in Iran were notorious for the large quantities of scorpions.[79] Pseudo-Aristotle's account may therefore perhaps be adduced in evidence for the combination of practical and cultural or religious reasons to relieve local inhabitants and travellers from the dangers of venomous creatures.

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[78] Sachau, *Chronology*, 216; *Āthār*, 229-230.

[79] Cf. the description of Ahwaz in C.E. Bosworth, *The Books of Curious and Entertaining Information. The Laṭāʾif al maʿārif of Thaʿālibi*, Edinburgh 1968, 126-127.

5. *Temple and cult*

1. *Fire-temples and Fire-cult*

Throughout their history, Zoroastrians have been described as "fire-worshippers."[1] This, it must be stressed, is not a term they have ever applied to themselves. Some modern Zoroastrians strongly object to this characterisation, since in their religious life, fire is considered to be an icon of the divine and not a divinity itself. Nevertheless, the elaborate cult of fire has always been an eye-catching aspect of Zoroastrianism and has continued to amaze foreign observers of this faith, from the earliest references to the present day.

Fire-rituals belong to the Indo-Iranian heritage of the Zoroastrian tradition. Both in Zoroastrianism and in Vedic religion, the tending of fire ranks among the most important aspects of religious life. Both traditions, however, have developed in rather different directions. Whereas the Vedas, and especially the Brāhmanas and Sūtras, bear evidence of the great elaboration and sophistication of Indian fire-rituals, the Iranian rituals have remained simple, at least by comparison.[2] The earliest text which can be used as a source for the assessment of the importance of fire in Zoroastrianism is the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* (especially Y. 36), which is a prose ritual text clearly centred around the tending of a fire, and is thought to be contemporary with the Gāthās.[3] There is a slight distinction between the ritual allusions to fire in the Gāthās and the prominence of the fire-cult in Y. 36, but this is generally explained as being caused by a difference in genre, the Gāthās containing more poetic and inspired utterances, and the *YH* giving the text of a ritual.[4] Thus one may consider it very likely that the gathering of the religious community around a fire, the source of light and warmth, and the tending of that fire, are among the original elements of Zoroastrianism. It is, furthermore, clearly a part of that tradition that has always retained its central position in the religious life of priesthood and laity alike, up to the present day.

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[1] One could point to words such as Gk *pursolatreia*; Lat *ignicoles*; Arm *hrapašt*, "fire-worshipping" and *moxrapašt*, "ash-worshipping"; NP *ātašparast*, "fire-worshipping" etc.

[2] For this subject, cf. J.C. Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice. An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*, Chicago/London 1993, one of the few recent works to pay attention to the development of the cult of fire in Indian *and* in Iranian religions.

[3] For the *YH*, cf. Narten, *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*.

[4] Narten, *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, 28-35.

When Ohrmazd created the world for the first time, in its spiritual (*mēnōg*) state, he created it in the form of bright white fire (*pad ātaxš kirb ī rōšn ī spēd*; GBd. 1.44). This fire is held to be part of the essence of Ohrmazd himself, of the eternal light. This creation was perfect and could not be attacked by the Evil Spirit. Fire is the essence of the divine world, and is represented by two divinities: Ātar, the god of fire itself (also a common word for fire), in its physical manifestation, and Aša Vahišta, the Ameša Spenta "Best Righteousness", lord of fire.[5] Fire is very often acclaimed as "the son of Ahura Mazdā," especially in those parts of the Avesta where the physical fire is addressed (the earliest example of which is Y. 36). Fire is responsible for growth and health; it is pure and must be kept pure. Defiling fire—by bringing it into contact with impure substances—is one of the worst possible sins. Extinguishing a fire is punishable by death.

There are various rituals associated with the cult of fire. In the elaborate discussions of various types of fire in the *Vendīdād* (Vd 8.81-96), we can find a glimpse of the importance of fire in daily life; fires were classified according to the use made of them (e.g. for potters, goldsmiths, cooking fires, hearth fires etc.). The highest class of fire was the temple-fire, which is installed during a long, impressive ceremony, by the mixing of the various types of fires.[6] Individual members of the Zoroastrian community can bring the embers or ashes from their fires to the fire-temple, there to cool in the presence of the sacred fire.[7] In this way, much of the personal and communal devotional life of Zoroastrian villages was centred around the various types of fire. In its elaborate form, this is undoubtedly an evolved tradition, not a remnant of Zoroaster's own times. One of the clear innovations in this respect is the institution of fire-temples, a practice unknown, it seems, in the earlier periods of the faith.[8]

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[5] Fire is also a prominent aspect of Mithra's responsibilities; cf. M. Boyce, 'On Mithra, Lord of Fire', *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg I* (*AI* 4), Teheran-Liège 1975, 69-76.

[6] Modi, *CC*, 210-243.

[7] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 72-74.

[8] For the development of the fire-cult, cf. M. Boyce, 'On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire', *JAOS* 95 (1975), 454-465; *ead.*, 'Iconoclasm among the Zoroastrians', in: J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman*

Apart from the fact that no unquestioned fire-temples from an early period have been found,[9] and elaborate rules for fire-temples are not found even in the youngest parts of the Avesta, an important reason to question the early existence of fire-temples was found in the Classical texts. Herodotus denies the existence of temples (of whatever nature) for the Persians (*Histories* 1.131). In the commentary on this passage, we have seen that the combination temple—statue—altar is used by Herodotus as the main representation of Greek religiosity. In his contrastive model of discussing the Persian religion—focusing on what the Persians do *not* do, rather than on what they do—his remark on the absence of temples distinguishes Persian religiosity conspicuously from Greek religiosity. It is interesting to note, that in this respect the Persians are equal only to the Scythians, with whom they indeed shared a religious heritage. Apart from Herodotus, Dino of Colophon is also explicit in his denial of the existence of Persian temples: Clement of Alexandria refers to him (*Protrepticus* 5.65.1) to the effect that the Persians sacrifice in the open air (ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ). Similarly, Xenophon does not seem to know of Persian temples but records a sacrifice on a hilltop, “as the Persians sacrifice” (*Cyropaedia* 8.7.3). In the Old Persian inscriptions, fire-temples are not referred to either. The occurrence of the word **brazmadāna* (Aram *brzmdn'*) on an Aramaic stele from Aswan, is thought to refer to a “place of rites,” that is a sacred, pure, enclosure where rituals could be performed. The OP word *āyadana-*, attested in DB 1.63-64, is a special case. Darius there proclaims that he has rebuilt the *āyadana*'s that Gaumāta the Magian had destroyed. The word has attracted considerable attention, since it is translated in the Babylonian version as “temples of the gods.” Apart from the interpretation as “temple” tout court, the word was taken to mean “place of rites” as well.[10] Most recently, however, it has been suggested that it may in fact have meant “rituals” rather than religious structures.[11]

From various sources, then, we can be comparatively certain that fire-temples were not in existence in the early Achaemenian

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Cults. Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty (SJLA 12), Leiden 1975, vol. 4, 93-111; Y. Yamamoto, ‘The Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire in Archaeology and Literature’, *Orient* 15 (1979), 19-53 (part I); *Orient* 17 (1981), 67-104 (part II).

[9] For an overview, cf. Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, *passim*.

[10] *HZ* II, 88-89.

[11] P. Lecoq, ‘Un aspect de la politique religieuse de Gaumata le Mage’, in: Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 183-186.

period. The introduction of fire-temples as such, however, is not described in contemporary sources, and has been the subject of much speculation.[12]

Although Herodotus does not mention the fact that fire occupies a central position in Persian rituals—indeed claims that it plays no significant role whatsoever—he does record twice that for the Persians fire was a divinity. In *Histories* 1.131, fire is included among the divinised aspects of nature receiving sacrifice, and in *Histories* 3.16, Herodotus mentions the fact that "Persians consider fire to be a god."

Xenophon refers to a fire-cult a few times, in the context of royal sacrifices.[13] In *Cyropaedia* 1.6.1, Cyrus prays to "the ancestral hearth" (Hestia) and to "ancestral Zeus" and the other gods. In *Cyropaedia* 7.5.57, Cyrus similarly sacrifices first to the ancestral hearth, and then to Zeus the King. These sacrifices to the hearth (Hestia) are found only in Xenophon. The two passages undoubtedly refer to the cult of fire. Of particular interest in this connection is the fact that the prayers and sacrifices to the Hearth precede the other prayers and sacrifices. This recalls Strabo's remark: "To whichever god they sacrifice, they pray to fire first" (*Geography* 15.3.16).

The royal cult of fire is also referred to by Curtius Rufus (3.3.9; 4.13.12; 4.14.24 etc.), who gives several descriptions of processions and other rituals, in which the sacred and eternal fire occupies an important place. Similar information can be obtained from Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.3.12, where fire is said to be carried on a great altar in a procession after the chariots to various divinities. Diodorus Siculus (17.114) has preserved the information that the sacred fires were quenched upon the death of the Great king, a piece of evidence that has been the source of some confusion.[14]

Most often, it is simply stated that fire is a god among the Persians, or that the Persians consider fire to be the most holy manifestation of the divine, the best element.[15] Sometimes it is stressed that fire may not be polluted, especially not by corpses.[16]

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[12] For which, cf. *HZ* II, 221-231.

[13] That Cyrus would have shouted: "We have the god Hephaistos at our side!", before explaining his plan to set fire to Babylon (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.22) strikes me as unlikely. In theory, of course, this could refer to Ātar, but it is probably one of the many romantic fictions or even parodies in the *Cyropaedia*.

[14] For various interpretations, cf. ch. 4.8.1.

[15] Vitruvius, *De architectura* 8.praef.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*

When it comes to the fire-cult, we find a great stress upon the fact that the fire is eternal, everlasting and unquenched. This accords well with the Zoroastrian prescriptions, according to which it is a mortal sin to extinguish a fire. Epithets attributed to the Persian fire stress its long life.[17] That the Persian priests always kept their fires burning is mentioned with great regularity. The earliest witness to this is Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.15, who in his description of the fire-sanctuaries in Cappadocia writes that the Magi guard the unquenchable fire in these sanctuaries. These sanctuaries, for which Strabo uses the word *pyraitheion*, are remarkable shrines in the middle of which the altar with the ever-burning fire is kept. The Magi enter these shrines every day, with *baresman* and *patidāna*, and sing in front of the fire for approximately an hour.[18] Something similar is described by Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 5.27.5-6: among the Lydians who are called Persians,[19] there are two sanctuaries—one in Hierocaesarea and one in Hypaipa—in which there is a small chamber. In this chamber, an altar with ashes is preserved. A Magus enters this chamber, puts on his *tiara*, places wood on the fire and reads a text in an unintelligible language from a book. Then—without any activity from the priest—the fire begins to burn in bright flames. Although there are some confusing elements in this description (especially the fact that the priest is said to read from a book), it is on the whole a faithful description of the daily tending of a lesser fire (that is, a fire that is allowed to "sleep" under a covering of ashes).[20] Both Strabo and Pausanias thus describe a larger

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5.65.1; Diogenes Laertius 1.6; Lucian, *Jupiter Tragicus* 42.690; Basil, *Epistle* 258.4; Epiphanius, *De Fide* 13.

[16] E.g. *Anthologia Palatina* 7.162 (Dioscurides); Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.14.

[17] Thus, for instance, *aeternus* (Curtius Rufus 4.13.12) and ἄσβεστος (Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.15). The tradition of an unquenchable fire is by no means exclusively Iranian. I regard it as doubtful, therefore, whether the inscription of Favonia Flacilla from Ephesos, addressed i.a. πυϱὶ ἀφθάϱτῳ, "to the etenal fire," refers to the Zoroastrian cult of fire (as Nilsson, *GGR* II, 342-343, suggested).

[18] For this passage, cf. ch. 3.2.3.

[19] For the difficulties of this first sentence, cf. *HZ* III, 235 with n. 217; Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 83; the passage may also be emended to the effect that Pausanias refers to a cult of the Persian Artemis.

[20] A convincing interpretation of the entire passage (in its ritual context) is given in *HZ* III, 235-238. Cf. also Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 83-84. The suggestion by Bidez and Cumont, *Mages* I, 148 (also 50 n. 2, with reference to 2 Macc 1.22) that the fire-miracle would have been caused by a crystal lens, through which the

building, in which the sacred fire is kept in a separate chamber. It is distinctly possible that alongside the chamber with the sacred fire there also was a chamber with the statue of a divinity, but there is no evidence to this effect. The coins from Hypaipa and Hierocaesarea frequently depict a statue of Anāhitā in one of her Anatolian manifestations.[21] On some coins, the statue is represented together with the image of a fire on an altar, which suggests that the cities of Hypaipa and Hierocaesarea indeed combined statue-cult with a cult of fire.[22]

In Christian authors, we find more detailed descriptions of fire-sanctuaries, although the polemical goals of the narratives frequently obfuscate the ritual reality of what is being described. A popular story concerns the headache of the Persian king Yazdegird I.[23] This Persian king suffered from bad headaches. He had a great esteem for Marouthas, the bishop of Mesopotamia, much to the regret of the powerful Magi, who feared that the king would be converted to Christianity. Marouthas cured him of his headaches with his prayers. The Magi resented Marouthas' successes with the king and thought of a trick to make Marouthas fall into disgrace: "Because the Persians worship fire, and it is customary that the king reverences the perpetually burning fire in a certain chamber, they hid a man under the earth and ordered him, when the king would do his customary prayers again, to speak up (and say), that the king must be thrown out, for he had been impious, because he considered the Christian priest to be a pious man." Their plan was carried out and the king intended to throw out Marouthas, but Marouthas prayed and uncovered the conspiracy. Subsequently Yazdegird decimated the priesthood and allowed Marouthas to establish churches and congregations wherever he wished to do so.

Although there is little reason to accept the story as historically sound (especially where the decimation of the entire priesthood is concerned), the mention of the ritual is interesting in itself: in a small chamber (referred to either as οἶκος or οἰκίσκος) the sa-

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rays of the sun would have been concentrated, is far from convincing (and entirely speculative). The simpler solution suggested in *HZ* III is to be preferred.

[21] *HZ* III, 227-235 with references.

[22] *HZ* III, 235; Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 81-82.

[23] Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 7.8.3-17. Yazdegird I (r. 399-421) has a very good name among Christian authors and a bad reputation in the Zoroastrian tradition, which gave him the epithet "the Sinner." Cf. Christensen, *Iran sous les Sassanides*, 269-273.

cred fire is kept continually burning, and it is customary for the king to enter this chamber and say prayers to the fire. This refers to the five daily prayers which must be said in the presence of fire (or a source of light).

A higher-ranking fire-temple is mentioned by Procopius, *De bello Persico* 2.24.2. Khusraw went from Assyria to Azarbayjan: "In that place is the great sanctuary of fire, which the Persians reverence above all other gods. There the fire is guarded unquenched by the Magi, and they perform carefully a great number of sacred rites, and in particular they consult an oracle on those matters which are of the greatest importance." (trl. H.B. Dewing, LCL) This clearly refers to the great fire *Ādur-Gušnasp*, one of the three great fires of the Sasanian period, in this case the fire of Media which is associated with the warrior estate.[24]

A comparable connection between fire-cult and divination is made by Agathias, *Historiae* 2.25: "Fire they hold to be worthy of reverence and very holy, and for this reason the Magi keep it unquenched in certain holy buildings, set apart, and look toward it while performing their secret rites and inquiring about the future."[25] If one takes into account Agathias' customary negative slant on Zoroastrianism, it is a fair description of a fire-temple: a holy building, set apart, where rituals are performed. That priests look into the fire would seem to be unavoidable in the rituals of the tending of fire. That a non-Zoroastrian would interpret this as a divinatory rite is understandable, even though it is incorrect.[26] Fire-worship, as worship of all elements,[27] was particularly unacceptable to Christian authors. They also appear to be the only ones to have coined derogatory words inspired by the fire-cult to denote Zoroastrians (πυρσολάτρης) and their religion (πυρσολατρεία).[28] The tenacity of the fire-cult among the Zoroastrians is well illustrated by a fragment from the Byzantine historian Priscus (frg. 31 Dindorff): as part of the negotiations between Persians and Romans, a Persian envoy stressed the importance for those Persians who lived in Roman territories to maintain their traditional religion, and—in particular—to be able to maintain the sacred and eternal fire.[29]

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[24] For the three great fires, cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 123-125; for Ādur-Gušnasp, cf. M. Boyce, 'Ādur-Gušnasp', *EIr* I, 475-476; Schippmann, *Feuerheiligtümer*, 308-357. There is an entire monograph devoted to this temple, L.I. Ringbom, *Graltempel und Paradies. Beziehungen zwischen Iran und Europa im Mittelalter*, Stockholm 1951, but it consists mainly of fantastic claims and unwarranted speculations.

[25] Translated by A. Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sassanians', 82-83.

[26] It can be found repeated, for instance, in Eustathius' Commentary on Dionysius' *Periegesis* 970; cf. also the references in Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sasanians', 99.

[27] For which, cf. ch. 4.1.6.

[28] Georgius Pisida, *Heraclias* 1.14 (part of a calumny of king Khusraw II, who is described as a king who "deifies fire and imagines himself a god", *Heraclias* 1.23); Philippus Solitarius, *De rebus Armeniae*, *PG* 127.888C.

2. *Image-shrines and Image-cult*

The ancient Iranians did not make or worship statues or other visual representations of their divinities. Zoroastrians, it seems, did not object in principle to the representation of divinities in works of art, but they did not develop a cult of these representations before the Achaemenian period.[30] In that era, a cult of statues seems to have developed among the Zoroastrians, which took its examples for representing divinities from neighbouring cultures, especially from Greco-Anatolian representations.[31] In the Sasanian period, a strong iconoclastic movement arose, which succeeded in eradicating all traces of the statue-cult from those Zoroastrian lands which were under Sasanian dominion.[32] The iconoclastic movement, however, was only directed against those representations of divinities which were the objects of a cult, not against representations of divinities *tout court*. The numerous reliefs depicting, for instance, Ohrmazd and Anāhīd never were the object of a cult and were therefore left intact.[33]

Our main evidence for the development of statue-cult among the Persians comes from Greek literature and from coins. Even this evidence, however, is meagre. It is frequently recorded that, contrary to the usages of the Greeks, the Persians did not have statues of their divinities. The best known example is Herodotus, *Histories* 1.131; in the *Histories*, the Persians share this distinctive absence of cult statues with the Scythians (4.57).[34] Herodotus' remarks on the absence of cult-statues are confirmed by a similar account in Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 5.65.1, who invokes Dino as his source. Similarly, Strabo mentions the absence of cult statues (*Geography* 15.3.13), in spite of the fact that he mentions a *xoanon* of Ōmanos in *Geography* 15.3.15. Diogenes Laertius 1.6 also mentions the fact that the Persians do not accept cult statues, and so does Epiphanius, *De Fide* 13.

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[29] Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 125.

[30] Some scholars, however, have claimed the existence of an Iranian-style statue of Anāhitā, which would be the basis of the description of this goddess in her hymn, Yt. 5. Against this theory, cf. ch. 4.1.3.

[31] Almost all known statues of Iranian divinities are statues of Anāhitā. These are known from coins minted at various cities of Asia Minor. For the development of the statue types of Anāhitā, cf. R. Fleischer, *Artemis von Ephesos und verwandte Kultstatuen aus Anatolien und Syrien* (EPRO 35), Leiden 1973; W. Helck, *Betrachtungen zur groęen Göttin und den ihr verbundenen Gottheiten* (Religion und Kultur der alten Mittelmeerwelt in Parallelforschungen 2), München 1971.

[32] For all these matters, cf. M. Boyce, 'Iconoclasm among the Zoroastrians', in: J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults. Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty* (SJLA 12), Leiden 1975, vol. 4, 93-111; cf. also *ead.*, 'Toleranz und Intoleranz im Zoroastrismus', *Saeculum* 21 (1970), 325-343.

[33] Cf. Russell, *ZorArm*, 154.

It is a distinct possibility, that some Zoroastrians never developed a cult of statues, even in the Achaemenian period. At the same time, it is certain that others did. History points at the Achaemenian king Artaxerxes II as the person responsible for this innovation. Berossus is quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 5.65.3, to this effect: "And yet, after many years, they began to worship statues in human form, as Berossus reports in the third book of his *Chaldaean History*; this has been introduced by Artaxerxes, the son of Darius Ochus. He was the first to erect the statue of Aphrodite Anaïtis in Babylon, and to suggest such worship to those in Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactra, Damascus and Sardis."[35] Further evidence for statue worship, however, is difficult to procure. There are some descriptions of statues of Persian divinities. A golden statue of Anāhitā is mentioned by Pliny, *Natural History* 33.4.82-83. He writes that this statue was the first solid golden statue ever to have been produced. It was kept in the land Anaetica; Anaïtis was the most sacred divinity for the inhabitants of the region. The statue was taken away by Marcus Antonius during his Parthian campaign (36 BCE). Pliny also records that it was thought that whoever had stolen the statue had become blind and lame and subsequently died.

A golden statue of Mithra is mentioned by Lucian, *Jupiter Tragicus* 8, but the passage does not inspire much confidence: it aims to ridicule Oriental cults, contrasting the simple Greek representations of the gods with lavish and decadent "Oriental" cult statues. An image of Ōmanos (Vohu Manah) is mentioned by Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.15. It is said to be carried around in a procession (cf. ch. 3.2.3).

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[34] Cf. Mora, *Religione e religioni*, 27-30.

[35] For the places mentioned by Berossus, cf. ch. 4.1.3.

There are also more dubious cases. Curtius Rufus 3.3.16 mentions a chariot adorned with statues of gods; the gods he mentions, however, are not Iranian: Ninus and Bel. Pausanias 7.6.6 mentions the fact that a bronze statue of Adrastos was placed by the Lydians before the sanctuary of the Persian Artemis. This, however, does not refer to a cult statue. Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* 5, describes a representation of the god and goddess of fire among the Persians. The Persians distinguish between two aspects of fire, which they attribute to the two sexes; they make representations of the god and the goddess of fire. The representation of the goddess has the form of a woman with three faces; this is Hecate, who is sometimes represented or mentioned in Mithraic monuments (*CIMRM* 395A; 1187).[36]

Even if we accept the fact that the temples of Anāhitā in Anatolia were image-shrines, the information to be obtained from Classical texts is meagre. Both Strabo and Pausanias—our main witnesses—describe standard Zoroastrian rituals in the sanctuaries of Anāhitā: priests come in and tend the fire. They do not mention statues, nor specific aspects of statue-cult. The evidence for this, therefore, is limited to representations of the statues themselves on coins and to some scattered references in Armenian literature, which are difficult to interpret because of the standard Christian equation between paganism and statue-cult.[37]

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[36] For this passage in Firmicus Maternus, cf. R. Turcan, *Firmicus Maternus. L'erreur des religions païennes*, Paris 1982, 204-206.

[37] Cf. for example the references to a statue of Aramazd in the *Synaxarion* of Tēr Israel, mentioned by Gray, *Foundations*, 23. Equally problematic are the references to the statue of Armazi in the Georgian chronicles; cf. M. van Esbroeck, 'La religion géorgienne pré-chrétienne', 2706-2708.

6. *Ritual*

1. *Libation Rituals*[1]

In his general description of Persian religion, Herodotus states that the Persians do not know libations (*Histories* 1.132). This has been a constant source of amazement, because the Zoroastrian ritual as we know it does comprise a libation ritual. Similarly, libations have a prominent place in ancient Indian rituals and are therefore generally regarded as forming part of the Indo-Iranian religious heritage. Herodotus' information, moreover, is immediately contradicted by his own descriptions of libations performed by the Magi during the military campaigns of the Persian armies, which form the main part of his historical narrative. Herodotus' information is therefore generally regarded as being based on the specific nature of the Greek libation (in this case the σπονδή),[2] the ingredients of which (wine or milk, honey and oil etc.) indeed do not occur in known Iranian libations. The Greek libation, moreover, regularly comes after the animal sacrifice and, for instance, concludes the ritual by pouring the wine onto the flames burning on the altar. These practices are not found in Iranian rituals, where the libation occupies a different place in the ritual and where the pouring of wine on any sort of fire is unimaginable.

Herodotus does in fact describe libations performed by the Persian Magi. Xenophon likewise describes such rituals, and these are of considerable interest, because little is known on the Iranian rituals connected with war or with an army on the move. In *Histories* 7.43, the Magi are said to pour out libations (this time Herodotus uses the word χοή, a libation connected with chthonic rituals, in which the liquid was poured on the earth) dedicated to the heroes in the vicinity of Ilium. At the same time, Xerxes performs a sacrifice to Ilian Athena. All this is generally seen as a very unlikely course of events, because it presupposes knowledge of the Trojan war and other Greek stories on the part of the Persians. This is a *topos* in the *Histories* themselves (indeed, a prominent reason for the writing of the book according to the statements in *Histories* 1.1-5) but otherwise extremely unlikely.

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[1] Cf. M. Boyce, '*Ātaš-zōhr* and *Āb-zōhr*', *JRAS* 1966, 100-118.

[2] Burkert, *GR*, 70-73.

Nevertheless, if we consider the evidence from Xenophon, we may suppose that there was a certain reality behind libations performed by the Magi.

Xenophon gives two different descriptions of libation rituals, which are both problematic. In *Cyropaedia* 2.3.1, he writes: "And finally when they had made the third libation and prayed the gods for their blessings, the party broke up, and they all went to bed." (trl. W. Miller, LCL) Xenophon refers to the libation with the words τὰς τϱίτας σπονδάς, which corresponds to the technical Greek term for the third and final libation, which was devoted to Zeus the Saviour (Zeus Soter).[3]

In *Cyropaedia* 3.3.22, Cyrus—having performed several sacrifices to honour various divinities—"then also appeased the Earth with libations (χοαῖς)." This again reflects Greek religiosity rather than Iranian practices: the χοή was a libation with a chthonic character, consisting of pouring liquids onto the earth (usually in the context of rituals connected with the dead), which has so far not been attested in Zoroastrian sources.[4]

These references may be explained in terms of the confusion in Herodotus and Xenophon concerning the nature of some of the rituals they witnessed (or heard about), or even as a case of attributing Greek ritual acts to Persians, which had no basis in Iranian reality. Against this latter interpretation, one could refer to a passage in the eighth book of the *Dēnkard*, which purports to be a summary of an Avestan text. The text in question deals with the warrior state among the Persians (the *artēštārān*) and includes a reference to rituals performed in a war situation: "On the ritual on the day of the battle and the struggle against evil-doing. And on the plant for the *barsom* of that ritual and the Avestan (to be recited) in (a situation of) fighting. The first arrow must be shot towards the banner. And (on) the performance of the ritual, which must include a libation to the water that is closest to the battlefield."[5]

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[3] Cf. LSJ, s.v. τϱίτος 1.

[4] With the important exception of several archaeological finds from Central Asia, where pots (with traces of liquids) buried upside down in the earth were found at the North-West side of a temple. For references, cf. *HZ* III, 168-171.

[5] *Dk*. 8.26.24: *Abar yazišn ī rōz ī kārezār ud razm ī duš-kunišn ud urwar ī barsom ī ān yazišn ud abestāg andar kōšīdan. ān ī fradom tīr andar wistan <ō> nišān ud [d'št] yaštan ī pad-iz zōhr-barišnīh <ī ō> āb ī ō kārezār gyāg nazdtar*. For the text and (a slightly different) translation, cf. A. Tafazzoli, 'Un chapitre du *Dēnkard* sur les guerriers', in: Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 297-302.

There is no reason to doubt the antiquity of the information. It is at any rate very likely that some ritual would be performed in a battle situation. That this ritual would include a libation to water is also very likely. The question therefore is whether Herodotus and Xenophon refer to rituals they knew of—or witnessed—or projected Greek practices onto an Iranian situation. This question is difficult to answer, but a certain confusion between what they heard about and what was actually performed may have given rise to their descriptions.

This is certainly the case in the two most elaborate descriptions of libation rituals, which are found in Strabo's *Geography* and Appian's *Mithridateia*. These texts have been discussed already in the commentary on Strabo, but it is important to repeat the main points of the interpretation offered there in the context of a description of libation rituals. Strabo distinguishes two different rituals: a ritual in which the fire was tended—including a fat-offering and a libation—and a sacrifice to the waters, also including a libation. This passage, *Geography* 15.3.14, was commented upon by Mary Boyce as referring to the two great libation rituals known as *ātaš-zōhr* and *āb-zōhr*.[6] This is only partly true where the *āb-zōhr* is concerned, because what Strabo describes is the sacrifice of an animal dedicated to the water(s). As part of this sacrifice he mentions a libation, but the libation is not the most important part of the ritual, whereas the *āb-zōhr* is an independent ritual not entailing the killing of a sacrificial victim.

The libation to fire described by Strabo would scarcely have been understood as a libation by an average Greek. Strabo also does not refer to it as a libation. It consists of placing soft fat (πιμελή) on the fire. In Iranian terminology, this is called the *zōhr* (Av. *zaoθra-*) for the fire. Avestan *zaoθra-* is cognate with Skt *hotrá-*. Both terms refer to a sacrificial act consisting of the pouring of a liquid substance, usually onto the fire. The verb underlying both terms may be cognate also with Gk. χέω.[7] In Iranian religions—contrary to Greek practices—liquids such as wine are not poured into the fire. The only regular *zōhr* to the fire is the "libation" consisting of animal fat, frankincense and wood which is regularly offered to the fire. In addition to the placing of soft fat onto the fire, Strabo also mentions that the Persians "pour oil down" when they light the fire. This has been a constant source of amazement, for oil (ἔλαιον) is not used in Iranian rituals as far as is known, at least not in the tending of the fire. Perhaps, then, Strabo misinterpreted the fat offering to the fire (melted butter or melted animal fat) for oil.

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[6] M. Boyce, '*Ātaš-zōhr* and *Āb-zōhr*', *passim*.
[7] Benveniste, *Vocabulaire* II, 216; 223-224.

Such a misinterpretation is all the more likely in the case of the sacrifice to the waters. Strabo first of all uses terminology associated with chthonic offerings for this ritual. The animal is slaughtered (σφαγιάζω) in a pit (βόθρος). If indeed a pit was dug for this ritual—we only have Strabo's information for this—[8] it would be unlikely *a priori* that he could have witnessed the ritual without being reminded of similar Greek practices. This may account for his description of the contents of the libation and of the way of pouring out the libation: "[...] pouring out oil, mixed with milk and honey, not into the fire or the water, but on the earth." It is particularly the use of honey in this libation which causes problems, for honey was not used in Zoroastrian rituals because it is the product of an evil creature, the bee.[9] Libations of milk and honey, however, are well known from Greek practices,[10] as is the use of oil in libations.[11] The fact that the libation is poured onto the earth is also reminiscent of Greek chthonic offerings rather than the Iranian libation to water, which is always poured into the water.

The testimony of Appian also needs to be discussed in this context. He records an "ancestral" offering performed by Mithridates of Pontus such as it had also been performed by the Persian king at Pasargadae. Among the substances offered before the kindling of the fire, we find milk, honey, wine, oil and frankincense (*Mithridateia* 66). Here as well, the elements honey and oil are surprising. Appian's list is also reminiscent of the libation ritual performed by the Persian queen in Aeschylus' *Persians* to evoke the spirit of the deceased Darius: this libation consisted of milk, honey, water, wine, oil and flowers (*Persians* 609-618). Earlier generations of classical scholars reconstructed a Persian ritual through the combination of this text with Strabo's description of the Persian libation, but the libation in the *Persians* can be, and must be, wholly explained as a Greek representation of a Greek ritual, performed for Greek purposes with a Greek theatrical background.[12] Given the influence of the image of the Persians from Aeschylus' tragedy, however, one may wonder whether the details of the libations described by Strabo and Appian were not influenced either by living Greek practice, or by the example set in the *Persians*.

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[8] Prof. Kreyenbroek has informed me that the *Nērangestān* discusses the digging of a pit for animal sacrifice. The offal of the sacrifical animal was buried in such a pit. Evidence for similar practices (the burying of impure substances) can be found in Zoroastrian literature: nails and hair must be buried in a pit (Vd. 17.5; 17.7) and a pit was dug before defecating (PhlVd. 13.48).

[9] *PersRiv* 266; 399.

[10] Burkert, *GR*, 70-73; Graf, 'Milch, Honig und Wein'.

[11] Burkert, *ibid.*

Libation rituals were part of the Zoroastrian daily liturgy and also of the special ceremonies involving animal sacrifice. They also had a place in specific rituals performed in war situations. The Greek references dedicated to Persian libations offer faint glimpses of this ritual reality, but in all passages concerning Persian libations, the examples set by Greek understanding of the nature of the poured out liquids, the recipients of the offering and possibly the purpose of the rituals have obscured the Zoroastrian ideology and practice behind the *zōhr*-rituals.

2. *Animal Sacrifice*

If we take the Classical accounts of the Persian religion seriously—and we are hardly in a position not to—we must conclude that, contrary to more recent practices, animal sacrifice formed a prominent part of Zoroastrian rituals. There are not very many descriptions of Iranian rituals, but the most elaborate descriptions frequently and elaborately mention the sacrifice of different kinds of animals: horses, cows and small cattle. The status of animal sacrifice in Zoroastrianism has been the subject of debate in earlier treatments of Zoroastrianism. Many scholars professed the view that Zarathustra himself was opposed to animal sacrifice and devoted considerable effort to the abolition of sacrificial and ritualistic aspects of his ancestral faith (especially the slaughtering of animals and the consumption of Haoma).[13] This view, however, is almost certainly erroneous. It derives from a period when scholars found it important to present the prophet's teaching as essentially spiritual and antiritualistic. This approach is generally coupled with the notion of the perversion of Zarathustra's doctrine by his immediate followers, but fails to accommodate the overwhelming evidence to the contrary; Zarathustra, in all likelihood, was not opposed to animal sacrifice nor to the consumption of Haoma.[14] The least one can say is that this opposition cannot be found in the Gāthās themselves—which are now largely interpreted as ritual texts, even though the rituals which they are thought to accompany are rarely interpreted—and that the fact that there is not a trace of opposition to sacrifices or to the Haoma-cult in the remainder of the Avesta speaks against the view that Zarathustra's main mission was to abolish all rituals he was trained to perform.

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[12] Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 89-91 (with references).

[13] Thus, *inter multos alios*, Moulton, *EZ*, 395, n. 1; Nyberg, *Religionen*, 287-288; 330 etc.; Lommel, *Religion Zarathustras*, 248-249; Widengren, *Religionen*, 66; 109; Gnoli, *ZTH*, 183 etc.

The most important evidence for the fact that animal sacrifice and Haoma-pressing remained essential parts of Iranian rituals in the Zoroastrian period can be found in the Younger Avesta, especially from the Yašts and from the *Hōm Yašt* (Y. 9). In the Yašts, many heroes from Iranian mythology perform elaborate sacrifices (of horses, cows and small cattle) to obtain certain favours from the deities they invoke. The *Hōm Yašt* partially consists of a dialogue between Zarathustra and Haoma and opens with the presentation of Zarathustra preparing himself for the Haoma-pressing. The Zoroastrian traditions of animal sacrifice, moreover, are reflected in elaborate discussions of the technicalities of these rituals in, for instance, the *Nērangestān*.

Part of the discussion on the status of animal sacrifice in Zoroastrianism is due to the fact that the Parsi Zoroastrians abandoned animal sacrifice as part of their standard rituals.[15] Since the Parsi Zoroastrians were the main source of information on Zoroastrian ritual, their rejection of animal sacrifice (especially that of the cow), together with the idea that the Parsi tradition on the whole was conservative, led some scholars to assume that the status of sacrifice was a decisive characteristic with which one can measure the "orthodoxy" of those involved in it, or with which one could settle the question whether the religion described may be called Zoroastrianism.

Our earliest witness to Iranian animal sacrifice is Herodotus, who in *Histories* 1.132 gives an interesting description of animal sacrifice that has attracted considerable attention. Herodotus' description of the sacrifice is dominated by a contrastive approach: he distinguishes those elements that differ from the practices to which he himself and his audience are used. This is not only evident from the catalogue of absent Greek elements in the Persian rituals, but also from the fact that Herodotus passes over several important elements in silence (for instance the killing of the animal) and pays ample attention to other aspects of the ritual which are different from his·expectations. Of particular interest to him, apparently, were three things: the ritual was not performed for the attainment of the goal of an individual, but its intention was towards the common good of all Persians; the ritual was not a strictly individual lay affair, but a Magus had to be present; the animal was not sacrificed to the deity in the sense that its meat was burned or left for the deity. On the contrary, the meat was simply taken away.

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[14] Cf. particularly *HZ* I, 214-218.

[15] Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 173-174; 211.

This description of the Persian sacrifice is of the greatest importance because it refers to a lay sacrifice or an individual rite, not to an element of the priestly rituals. The passage has therefore been compared with the descriptions of sacrifices performed by heroes and villains in the Yašts.[16] These concern only animal sacrifice, dedicated to an individual divinity for the attainment of a certain goal. On the basis of the Yašts and of Herodotus, it seems that any lay man was capable of performing the sacrifice, which is contrary to more recent practice.

The sacrifice begins with a procession, in which the animal is led to a "pure place," the lay equivalent of the *pāvi* reserved for priestly or "inner" rites, most often situated on a hilltop or in the vicinity of sources of living water. Then the deity is invoked; this is comparable with the recitation of the *šnuman* or dedication of the ritual (addressed to an individual divinity) and also with the desire expressed by the individual divinities in their Yašts to be granted a sacrifice in which they are invoked by their own name (Yt. 8.11; cf. Yt. 10.31 etc.). The intention of the sacrifice is not devoted to the sacrificer directly, but to the community and the king. This is comparable with most prayers for blessing that have survived, although the position of the king is special in this respect. More regularly, the "ruler" or the "leader" is included in the blessings.[17] The animal is slaughtered (Herodotus does not refer to the manner of slaughtering) and cut to pieces. These pieces of meat are cooked. Then a mound of grass is constructed, on which the pieces of meat are arranged.[18] This can be compared with the well-attested practice of the construction of the *barhiś* in Indian rituals. The corresponding Avestan word appears to have been *barəsman* rather than *barziš*, which is only used in the meaning "pillow." The word *barəsman* (Phl *barsom*) is nowadays only used for the metal twigs used in the ritual, but in the Avesta and in the Pahlavi books, it is used both for the mound of grass and for the bundle of twigs.

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[16] E.g. Boyce, *HZ* I, 168-169; *Zoroastrianism*, 111-112.

[17] Cf. M. Boyce, 'Dahma Āfriti and some Related Problems', *BSOAS* 56 (1993), 209-218.

Then the Magus fulfils his function: he recites a text which is explained to Herodotus as a theogony, presumably a Yašt. Herodotus' observation that it is not customary to perform a sacrifice without the presence of a Magus makes it likely that the Magus has to be present not only because he is capable of reciting the appropriate formulae, but also to validate the ritual. The meat is then taken away to be used according to the wish of the dedicator.

We may compare Herodotus' description of animal sacrifice with the descriptions found in Strabo, which are not only more elaborate but also reveal differences in the details of the sacrifice. In *Geography* 15.3.13, Strabo gives a report comparable to that of Herodotus. Strabo's description, however, is different in some details. In Strabo's description, the animal is dissected by the Magus. Strabo also emphasises the fact that nothing is given to the deity, because the Persians say that the deity only receives the "soul" of the animal. The only exception to this is the placing upon the fire of a piece of the omentum.

This description of the sacrifice adds some important observations. The animal is wreathed and it is dissected by the priest. All this is more in accordance with contemporary practice than Herodotus' description. That the divinities receive the "soul" (Gr. ψυχή, probably rendering Av. *baoδah-*)[19] of the victim accurately interprets the Zoroastrian conception of the sacrifice. The placing upon the fire of the omentum is very well known from Indian rituals (*vapāhuti*) and there are some traces of it in Iranian texts as well. The offering of the omentum is also described by Catullus, *Carmen* 90, who refers to the "melting" of the omentum in the sacrificial flame.

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[18] For this aspect, cf. B. Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society. Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction*, Cambridge MA 1986, 54-56.

[19] Cf. J. Kellens, 'Die Religion der Achämeniden', *AoF* 10 (1983), 107-123, p. 118.

In *Geography* 15.3.14, Strabo refers to another variety of animal sacrifice, dedicated to the waters. A pit is dug in the vicinity of a source of water. Over this pit the animal is slaughtered, and care is taken that this act does not contaminate the water itself. The pieces of meat are placed upon herbs and the Magi touch it with slender twigs, recite certain texts and perform a libation of oil, milk and honey onto the earth (cf. ch. 3.2.3.). The recitations take up much time and are performed by priests who hold the bundle of twigs.

The ritual as described by Strabo is decidedly more priestly than the rituals in the other descriptions: mention is made only of the Magi and the typical priestly activities are found here in combination: animal sacrifice—recitation of texts—libation. These are the three standard elements of what may be reconstructed as the Indo-Iranian rituals on the basis of the scattered Iranian evidence and the elaborate Indian prescriptions.[20]

There is uncertainty with regard to the manner of killing the sacrificial animal. Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.15, writes that the Cappadocian Magi do not kill with a knife, but club the animal to death with a cudgel. In view of his earlier description of the sacrifice to the waters—which took place over a pit, lest the shedding of blood should defile the source of water—it is likely that there were Iranians who sacrificed the animal with a knife. Clubbing the animal to death, however, was also a regular practice, as it is implied in Zoroastrian and Armenian literature.[21]

In other passages, the sacrifices of animals are simply mentioned. Xenophon in particular frequently records sacrifices to the royal divinities. In *Cyropaedia* 8.7.3, he specifies that the sacrifices are customarily performed on a hilltop. In *Cyropaedia* 8.3.24, he mentions burnt offerings: bulls are burnt for Zeus, horses for the Sun, whereas unspecified animals are killed with a knife for the Earth. This description smacks of Greek rituals rather than Iranian rituals, and the information given by Xenophon must be rejected: burnt offerings have never been part of Iranian rituals.[22] The sacrifice of horses to Poseidon, performed by driving a chariot with the horses into the sea (Appian, *Mithridateia* 70) has been correctly interpreted as a Greek ritual for a Greek god.[23] Plutarch, *Life of Lucullus* 24, writes that cows were kept in the temple-estates of Anāhitā. These cows were sacred to the goddess and only used for sacrifices. As a sign of their dedication to the goddess, they were branded with her symbol: a torch.

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[20] For which, cf. Heesterman, *Broken World*, *passim*.

[21] For which, cf. Benveniste, 'Sur la terminologie iranienne du sacrifice', *passim*.

[22] Cf. *HZ* II, 215.

Finally, Basil, in his description of the Magusaeans of Cappadocia (*Epistle* 258.4), writes that the Magusaeans reject animal sacrifice altogether, because they consider it a pollution. The animals they need for sustenance are slaughtered "through the hands of others," but it is not entirely clear what Basil means with this.

3. *Prayers and Songs*

In contemporary Zoroastrian rituals, the recitation of texts has an important place. This is not confined to the priestly rituals, the *Yasna* and associated liturgies, but is equally important in the daily observances of the Zoroastrian laity. The prayers and other texts are sometimes recited in Avestan and sometimes in other languages (Pāzand, Persian, Gujarati etc.). From earlier literature, for instance the prescriptions found in the Persian *Ṣad dar*-texts, one can see that this practice is not a modern innovation. The *Ṣad dar*-texts are particularly valuable, because they contain many prescriptions for lay Zoroastrians and thus strengthen the suggestions from Pahlavi literature and from contemporary practice, that some Avestan texts were learnt by heart by most if not all Zoroastrians.

The recitation of sacred texts is of course a particular duty of the priesthood. Priests were responsible for the continuance of the tradition, by memorising (parts of) the sacred literature and reciting the appropriate texts at the appropriate occasions. This is also evident from Greek and Latin sources, where one of the activities of the Magi is the singing of songs or invocations. The texts recited are sometimes referred to with the word ἐπαοιδή or ἐπῳδή (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.132; Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.14). This term can be used with a positive meaning, but frequently denotes a charm or magical incantation.[24] It is of course hazardous to use this as an indication of the interpretation of the recited texts by the authors who refer to these, but there are two aspects of Zoroastrian recitation that could remind Greek observers of magical incantations: most texts are recited in a language incomprehensible to the audience (Avestan) and they are partly recited at a very low voice. There is no question about silent recitation, but recitation at a sound-level only barely audible for the audience is permitted.[25] Both characteristics belong to the common perceptions of magical incantations in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The former, the use of incomprehensible speech, is evidenced profusely in the so-called *voces barbaricae* from the Magical Papyri. The latter practice, silent or barely audible prayer, developed into a literary *topos* associating this practice either with evil intent or with (black) magic.[26] Both aspects, the incomprehensibility and the silence of Iranian recitations, are referred to in Greek and Latin literature;[27] the themes acquired a life of their own in Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic texts.[28]

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[23] *HZ* III, 297-298.

[24] Examples are given in Versnel, *Inconsistencies* I, 117-118; Burkert, 'ΓΟΗΣ. Zum griechischen "Schamanismus"', 39-41; for a full discussion of the term, cf.

The earliest reference to the recitation of texts is found in Herodotus, *Histories* 1.132, where a Magus is said to recite an invocation, which is explained to Herodotus (by unknown informants) as a theogony. The text can hardly have been anything other than a Yašt, even though there have been various different suggestions.[29] In *Histories* 7.191, the Magi appease a storm near the river Strymon, by sacrificing animals to the winds and by singing incantations with loud shouts (καταείδοντες βοῇσι).[30] In his *Carmen* 90, Catullus has preserved one of the shortest precise descriptions of Persian rituals, mentioning not only the melting of the *omentum* in the sacrificial flames, but also the worship of the gods with song.

Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.14-15 has preserved the most precise details concerning the recitation of texts. Having arranged the

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P. Boyancé, *Le culte des muses chez les philosophes grecs* (BEFAR 141), Paris 1972^2 (1936^1), 33-59, and cf. index s.v. ‘incantation.’

[25] Cf. on these questions, *N.* 8-10 (Kotwal-Kreyenbroek).

[26] P.W. van der Horst, ‘Silent Prayer in Antiquity’, *NUMEN* 41 (1994), 1-25, with references.

[27] Cf. Bidez & Cumont, *Mages* II, 245; 285-286.

[28] For the texts, cf. Widengren, *Religionen*, 249-251; for a brilliant interpretation, J.C. Greenfield, *‘rṭyn mgwš*”, in: S. Hoenig & L.D. Stitskin (eds.), *Joshua Finkel Festschrift*, New York 1974, 63-69.

[29] For a discussion, cf. ch. 3.1.3.

[30] The latter word occurs also as γόησι (emended to γοῇσι by Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 202), which would connect the Magi with sorcerers. For the possibilities, cf. How-Wells, *Commentary*, *ad locum*.

pieces of meat on the mound of herbs, a Magus holds the bundle of sticks (*baresman*), sings incantations and performs a libation. These incantations are said to last for a long time and to be accompanied by the holding of the bundle of sticks. This is the ritual accompanying the sacrifice of an animal to the waters.

In his description of the Cappadocian rituals (*Geography* 15.3.15), Strabo refers to the fire-sanctuaries (πυραιθεῖα), in the middle of which stands an altar covered with ashes, where the eternal fire is kept. Every day the Magi go in, and recite incantations for approximately one hour, holding the bundle of sticks and wearing the side-flaps of their *tiara* before the mouth (the so-called *paitidāna*). The same rituals are also performed in the shrines of Anaïtis and Ōmanos. The description of the Cappadocian rituals reflects the rituals associated with the tending of fire (e.g. *bōy dādan*): a daily ritual which consists of recitations of texts by a priest who holds the *baresman* and wears the *paitidāna*.

In the descriptions of sacred processions in the work of Curtius Rufus, the Magi are again specified as those who recite the texts. In 3.3.9, the sacred fire leads the procession, followed by the Magi who sing the ancestral song. In 5.1.22, Curtius Rufus distinguishes between the traditional occupations of the Magi and of the Chaldaeans: the Magi sing songs in praise of the kings, the Chaldaeans observe and calculate the motion of the stars.

The most famous hymns of the Magi are those preserved in Dio Chrysostomus, *Oration* 36.42-60. This is the only explicit attribution of a content to songs of the Magi. The hymns, however, are Stoic in wording and in content and most probably stem more from Dio's imagination than from Iranian traditions.[31] The invocations in Lucian's description of the Babylonian magus Mithrobarzanes (*Menippus* 6-7) reflect the common procedures of those who work magic, in this case with the goal of guiding a person into the underworld.[32]

Pausanias has preserved another description of a fire ritual, in which the recitation of texts has a prominent place (*Description of*

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[31] Beck, *HZ* III, 539-548. Although Beck assumes a Stoic background to the hymns, he thinks it possible that there is a genuine Iranian core in the hymns. As far as the metaphor of the horse-team is concerned, an evident candidate for comparison would be the description of horse-teams in the hymn to Mithra (e.g. Yt. 10.124-136; cf. Gershevitch, *AHM*, commentary *ad locum*). But the eternal cycles of conflagration and cataclysm as well the sacred marriage between Zeus and Hera are wholly alien to all known Iranian traditions.

[32] The genuine Iranian background of Lucian's description has been defended by Kingsley, 'Greeks, Shamans and Magi', 193, n. 25.

Greece 5.27.5-6). In the Persian temples in Lydia, there is a small chamber which contains an altar upon which there can be found ashes. A Magus enters the chamber, places wood on the fire, wearing the tiara, and sings invocations to the gods, in a barbarian language wholly incomprehensible to Greeks. Pausanias adds that he reads from a book. Without kindling, the wood catches fire. This passage has been convincingly interpreted as a description of a ritual for tending a lesser fire.[33] The texts recited would have to be in Avestan, but this presents at the same time a formidable problem, if Pausanias' information that the texts were read from a book is correct. We do not know of any attempt at writing down the Avesta before the mid-Sasanian period. Earlier scholars, it is true, have attempted to show the existence of an Arsacid written Avesta, but this is now generally rejected.[34] In the Pahlavi books, there are several accounts of earlier written versions of the Avesta, commissioned for instance by Vištāspa or Darius III, burned and stolen by Alexander, but these accounts are evidently fictitious. They served, moreover, as a legitimation of the introduction of Greek knowledge into Pahlavi literature: all useful Greek knowledge (e.g. on medicine and astrology) could be claimed as parts of the Avesta that had been stolen by Alexander.[35] If Pausanias is correct, we would have to believe that in the second century CE there existed written versions of ritual texts, probably in Avestan, in Western Anatolia. It has been suggested that the text referred to by Pausanias was an *aide-mémoire* or an abridged prayer-book rather than a complete transcript of the relevant texts.[36] A short imaginative account of what is said in front of the fire is offered by Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertatio* 2.4, who reports that the Persians sacrifice to fire, place sustaining materials on the fire and say: "Lord fire, eat!"

With the exception of the last passage, most passages on the recitation of texts stress that this is the function of priests. This is different in the case of prayers, for there are countless passages in which prayers of prominent Persians are described. These passages of course frequently use the custom of praying in the development of their narrative, as a literary device. Nevertheless, some aspects of Persian prayers are revealed every now and then.

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[33] *HZ* III, 235-238. Cf. also ch. 4.5.1.

[34] For this theory, cf. W.B. Henning, 'The Disintegration of the Avestic Studies', *TPS* 1942, 40-56 (= *Selected Papers* II, 151-167).

[35] For an overview of these passages, cf. Widengren, *Religionen*, 245-247. The reverse tradition, that Xerxes took with him all books from Greece to Persia, is also found in classical literature: Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 7.17.1.

[36] *HZ* III, 236-7; *Mages* I, 89-91; against the curious suggestion by Bidez and Cumont, that the texts would have been in Aramaic rather than Iranian (*ibid.*), cf. Widengren, *Religionen* 197.

In Herodotus, *Histories* 7.54, we find a description of an elaborate ritual performed before the Persian army under Xerxes crosses the Hellespont. At sunrise, the Persians sprinkle the (new) bridges with frankincense and cover the roads with myrtle. When the sun comes up, Xerxes performs a libation, from a golden phial, to the sea and prays towards the sun. The description of the ritual has notable Greek overtones[37] and several elements that are difficult to connect with Iranian practices (a libation into salt water, for instance). Two aspects of it are reminiscent of Iranian practices: the time of prayer (at sunrise) and the direction of the prayer (towards the sun). We find these aspects again in Xenophon's description of Cyrus' ritual behaviour, *Cyropaedia* 8.1.23: "And he never failed to sing hymns to the gods at daybreak and to sacrifice daily to whatsoever deities the magi directed" (trl. W. Miller, LCL). The practice is of course well attested for Zoroastrian rituals, for praying at sunrise is an obligation for all Zoroastrians, and prayers should be said facing the sun or any other source of fire or light.[38] We encounter the prayer at sunrise in some other passages as well. In Polyaenus, *Stratagemata* 7.12, the king prays to Apollo (Mithra) at sunrise, that he would send rain and save the Persian armies that had been led into the desert without food or water by a Scythian horsekeeper who wanted to save the Scythians.[39] In Procopius, *De bello Persico* 1.3.17-22, a curious event is told concerning the Sasanian king Pērōz, which took place during a disastrous campaign against the Hephthalites. The Persian army was on the defence, and the king of the Hephthalites demanded that Pērōz would recognise his sovereignty by bowing before him. Pērōz consulted the Magi on this subject. "And they reminded him that it was the custom among the Persians to prostrate themselves before the rising sun each day; he should, therefore, watch the time closely and meet the leader of the Hephthalites at dawn, and then, turning toward the rising sun, make his obeisance." (trl. H.B. Dewing, LCL)

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[37] Cf. for instance How-Wells, *Commentary*, *ad locum*, who refer to similar rituals performed by Alexander, to propitiate Poseidon.

[38] Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 32-33.

[39] For the passage, cf. P. Calmeyer, 'Der "Apollon" des Dareios', *AMI* 22 (1989), 125-130; against Calmeyer's interpretation of the divinity as Tištrya, cf. ch. 4.1.5.

Apart from these passages, there are numerous other texts in which Persians are said to pray. In Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, Cyrus is depicted praying to the ancestral Hearth and other gods. The primary reference to the ancestral Hearth in this passage (*Cyropaedia* 1.6.1), may suggest that the prayers were indeed, as is customary, said facing the hearth fire. Elsewhere in the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon mentions sacrifices to the hearth and to other gods (e.g. 7.5.57). Prayers are also said to "the gods" and related collective appellations (*Cyropaedia* 2.1.1; 2.3.1). One of the very few Persian prayers to be quoted in Greek literature is a prayer attributed to Cyrus, who has just been warned in a vision that his death is imminent. He brings sacrifices to ancestral Zeus, the Sun and the other gods, and says a prayer invoking blessing upon himself, his relatives and friends and upon his country (*Cyropaedia* 8.7.3). There can be little doubt that the prayer is Xenophon's invention, even though several aspects of it are commonly found also in Zoroastrian prayers. This is also undoubtedly true of the invocations attributed to Darius III in Curtius Rufus 4.13.12 and 4.14.24: Darius invokes the Sun and Mithra and the eternal fire, or the ancestral gods and the eternal fire. An invented prayer can be found in Plutarch, *Life of Themistocles* 28, where the Persian king is said to address Ahreman in the company of his friends.[40]

4. *Festivals*

The calendars of ancient Iran are a well-investigated, but as yet insufficiently understood subject of Iranian culture.[41] The same is true for the Zoroastrian festivals and their place in the calendar.[42] The Zoroastrian year is divided into 12 months of 30 days, with a complementary set of five days. The months of the year and the days of the month are named after Zoroastrian divinities; it is uncertain how old this practice is.

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[40] Cf. ch. 4.2.1.

[41] For overviews, cf. W. Hartner, 'Old Iranian Calendars', *CHI* 2, 714-792; E. Bickerman, 'Time-Reckoning', *CHI* 3, 778-791, with very extensive bibliography on pp. 1335-1338 (to which W. Belardi, *Studi mithraici e mazdei*, Roma 1977, 59-149 should be added). Of subsequent publications, mention must be made of B. Marshak, 'The Historico-Cultural Significance of the Sogdian Calendar', *Iran* 30 (1992), 147-154; N. Sims-Williams, 'Mithra the Baga', in: Bernard & Grenet (eds.), *Histoire et cultes*, 177-186 (with references to the Armenian and Georgian materials); A. Panaino, 'Calendars I. Pre-Islamic Calendars', *EIr* 4 (1990), 658-668.

[42] For an overview: M. Boyce, 'Iranian Festivals', *CHI* 3, 792-815 (with bibliography on pp. 1335-1338). The recent collection of sources in Ḥ. Rāżī,

There are two Zoroastrian cycles of festivals: the *Gāhāmbār* and the named festivals. To these must be added many festivals, possibly of local significance, that were recorded in Bīrūnī's *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, the main source for the history of Zoroastrian calendars and feasts. If we take seriously the information provided by the classical authors, we must also add one significant festival celebrated by the Persians in antiquity that was not recorded in any Oriental source: the *Sacaea*.

The main religious festivals are the *Gāhāmbār*, the Gāthā-festivals. They are six (or seven) in number, divided throughout the year, and the celebration of these festivals is one of the main duties of observant Zoroastrians. The festivals are known by ancient names, which show a characteristic division of the year: midsummer, midyear, bringing in the corn, homecoming (of the herds) etc. The most important of these is the celebration of the spring equinox, which came to be called "New Day" (*Now rūz*) or New Year (**Navasard*) and is the seventh festival of the cycle.[43] The New Year festival was preceded by a festival dedicated to the Fravašis, the spirits. Bīrūnī mentions the *Gāhāmbār* and stresses their importance. In the Classical texts, the observance of the *Gāhāmbār* is wholly absent, as is (surprisingly) virtually every reference to the New Year celebrations.

The named festivals are divided throughout the year on the basis of the names of the months and the days: when the name of the month and the name of the day coincide (i.e. the day Urdwahišt of the month Urdwahišt), then the festival of the divinity (Urdwahištagān) is celebrated. Some of these named festivals are ancient and of great importance (for instance *Mithrakāna*), others appear to have been introduced—in a later development—only on the basis of the above-mentioned system. Of the named festivals, the classical authors mention Mithrakāna (to which the Magophonia may also refer) and refer to a festival that is sometimes connected with Spenta Ārmaiti.

The Old Persian calendar—as far as it is understood—is

Gāhšomārī va jašnhā-ye īrān-e bāstān. [Chronology and Ancient Iranian Festivals], Tehran 1992, contains a wealth of material (especially from Arabic and early Persian sources), but is rarely original or reliable in interpretations.

[43] *HZ* I, 172-174.

largely based on agricultural divisions. Several month names are derived from the agricultural occurrences in those months, such as “the gathering of garlic”, or “the sowing of corn”,[44] others have been convincingly explained as referring to religious festivals, that is “the month of the festival for the Baga (= Mithra)” and “the month of the festival for fire”.[45]

It is still unclear when the Old Persian calendar was replaced by the Zoroastrian calendar. The earliest mention of a Zoroastrian month-name may have been preserved in the Aramaic inscription on Darius’ tomb in Naqš-i Rustam, but since this inscription is barely legible, no firm conclusions may be drawn from it.[46]

The advent of Zoroastrianism among the Persians will undoubtedly have caused them to adopt several festivals that were seen as obligatory. There can also be little doubt that these festivals were combined with those observed by the Persians before the introduction of Zoroastrianism. We know, for instance, that the Soghdians had a cycle of festivals that combined the Zoroastrian feasts with local festivals.[47] A similar development may have taken place among the Persians. This may explain why the classical authors are silent on almost all Zoroastrian festivals, but have given vivid descriptions of festivals that are otherwise scarcely known.

The main source for the Iranian festivals is the ninth chapter of Bīrūnī’s *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, called “On the Festivals in the Months of the Persians”.[48] Several other Arabic authors, as well as some early Persian ones, provide important information.[49]

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[44] Cf. W. Eilers, *Der alte Name des persischen Neujahrsfestes*, Wiesbaden 1953; for further references, cf. Sims-Williams, ‘Mithra the Baga’. The interpretation of *Θāigraci-* as “month of the gathering of garlic” may seem unlikely (although it is phonetically understandable) and has indeed been disputed (*HZ* II, 25) but since in later times a festival called *sīr-sūr* (“garlic-feast”) was celebrated (in a different month), there is no reason to suggest that such an interpretation is impossible.

[45] Cf. Sims-Williams, ‘Mithra the Baga’, *passim* (with references); differently: *HZ* II, 24-25.

[46] Kellens, ‘Die Religion der Achämeniden’, 121; for a recent treatment of the introduction of the Zoroastrian calendar (claiming a very high antiquity for it), cf. Marshak, ‘Historico-Cultural Significance’.

[47] Marshak, ‘Historico-cultural Significance’, *passim*.

[48] Edited and translated by Sachau, *Āthār* (edition) and *Chronology* (translation); important additions can be found in J. Fück, ‘Sechs Ergänzungen zu Sachaus Ausgabe von al-Bīrūnīs “Chronologie Orientalischer Völker”’, in: J.W. Fück (ed.), *Documenta Islamica Inedita*, Berlin 1952, 69-98, on pp. 83-84.

[49] These can be conveniently consulted in Rāżī, *Gāhšomārī va jašnhā-ye īrān-e bāstān*, *passim*.

These sources are late and are difficult to use. Bīrūnī, a Khwarezmian by birth, mentions several authors as his source who are otherwise unknown (for instance al-Īrānšahrī), and whose reliability can therefore not be ascertained. He also frequently mentions collective sources (e.g. "they" or "the charm-mongers" (Ar. *nayranjāt*, from Phl *nērang*, "ritual", in its early NP meaning "sorcery" etc.) and relies often on discussions with priests, laymen, and his own observations or recollection. This multitude of sources of information has caused him to reproduce very different associations and meanings in his descriptions and interpretations of the Persian festivals. Festivals evidently mean different things to different people and it is thus very likely that Bīrūnī included in his descriptions several local or personal views on the significance of the dates and feasts.

Using Bīrūnī as a source for the Iranian festivals is therefore sometimes a complicated matter. His descriptions of the festivals, their origins, celebrations, and meanings, offer a wealth of associations that may have attached to them. It is important in this respect to distinguish the several layers or cycles of associations. These may be religious, mythological, agricultural, epic, astrological and divinatory. Bīrūnī does not simply describe one interpretation—for instance religious significance—but combines several, and includes not only the "Zoroastrian" festivals that continue to be celebrated to the present day, but also a multitude of feasts that were of local significance or were observed only by certain classes among the Iranians (and eventually disappeared).

A typical example is his description of Mithrakāna (*Mihragān*).[50] Bīrūnī discusses the date of the festival, the meaning of the name of the divinity, the royal rituals connected with the festival, the fair held at the festival, etc. In interpretations he offers cosmogonical speculations (attributed among others to the Persian theologians, Ar. *aṣḥāb al-taʾwīl*, "exegetes"), epic associations (with the stories of Ferīdūn), astrological occurrences, etc. Some of the associations with the festival are attributed to personal observations (e.g. from Salmān al-Fārisī), but most explanations and associations are simply listed. It is therefore impossible to gauge the antiquity of these various connections. This is particularly true of the cosmogonical and the epic associations. Boyce, for instance, regards the epic associations—the inclusion of the festivals into the cycle of stories connected with Jamšīd or Ferīdūn—as late, possibly of the late Sasanian period.[51] Since most of the stories connected with the festivals have an Avestan background, the possibility that the associations with the stories concerning Ferīdūn and Zoḥḥāk/Aži Dahāka are more ancient than she assumes must be kept open. Although Boyce is correct in stating that there are no clear traces of New Year heroes fighting with a dragon supposedly underlying the New Year festivals,[52] Bīrūnī's descriptions of the various festivals show that—at least on a popular level—several festivals were connected with a liberating act, which helped the development of the world.[53] Since these associations appear to go back to Indo-Iranian myths (the improved second creation, the liberation of the cows),[54] it appears unlikely that their connection with the festivals should have been introduced in the late Sasanian period.

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[50] Sachau, *Chronology*, 207-209; *Āthār*, 222-224.

a) Mithrakāna

The name of the festival for Mithra is known from Middle Persian and from New Persian as *mihragān*. The Old Iranian form of this would have been **miθrakāna-* but it has not been attested in any Old Iranian language. The name is known from Greek transcriptions, in which it is rendered as Μιθϱαϰανα or as Μιθϱαϰινα. It was a festival dedicated to the divinity Mithra, and was located on or near the day Mithra of the month Mithra after the fixation of the calendar. There is also evidence for the fact that it was an autumn festival, competing with Nowrūz for the honour of being the most important festival of the Persians.[55]

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[51] 'Iranian Festivals', 801.

[52] *HZ* I, 102, n. 110; the theory of the New Year dragon-hero combat derives from G. Dumézil, *Le problème des centaures*, Paris 1929; the main advocates of it are S. Wikander and G. Widengren. Cf. for a succinct overview, Widengren, *Religionen*, 41-51 etc. One of its main pillars was the presumed association with comparable Ancient Near Eastern rituals, especially the Babylonian *akītu*-celebration. Against such an interpretation of the *akītu*-festival, cf. K. van der Toorn, 'The Babylonian New Year Festival: New Insights from the Cuneiform Texts and their Bearing on Old Testament Study', in: J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume. Leuven 1989* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 43), Leiden 1991, 331-344.

[53] Thus for Now rūz, he mentions the fact that "the cursed Iblīs had deprived eating and drinking of their beneficial effect, so that people could not satisfy their hunger nor quench their thirst; and he had prevented the wind from blowing. So the trees withered up and the world was near to utter decay." (*Chronology* 202; *Āthār* 217). The world was liberated by the coming of Jam. The festival of *gāw-gil* ("the cow-herd") commemorates the fact that Ferīdūn liberated the cows that had been secluded by Bēwarasp (*Chronology* 212; *Āthār* 226).

[54] Kreyenbroek, 'Mithra and Ahreman', *passim*.

The only classical author to mention the festival Mithrakāna by name is Strabo, *Geography* 11.14.9: "And the satrap of Armenia sent 10,000 foals every year to Persepolis, for Mithrakāna (τοῖς Μιθρακίνοις)." The festival is also referred to (with the correct vowels) in an inscription from Amorium (Phrygia, 1st century CE), which orders a feast to be celebrated annually "on the customary Mithrakāna days" for the memory of a certain Cyrilla, to be endowed from the income of a vineyard.[56] In spite of the length of the inscription, there are no directions for the celebration of the festival; we only know, therefore, that the date of Mithrakāna was kept in Phrygia in the first century CE.

The gift of 10,000 foals to Persepolis every year for Mithrakāna needs to be seen in the light of the tradition of sending gifts to the Iranian kings (and the redistribution of these gifts), which was particularly connected with the two major festivals, Nowrūz and Mithrakāna.[57] It has been suggested that Strabo's information on the 10,000 foals shows that Mithrakāna in Strabo's time was celebrated as an autumn festival, because the foals would then have been reared through the summer with the mares.[58]

In some other passages, a "festival for Mithras," evidently Mithrakāna, is described. The details mentioned all focus upon the king. Athenaeus has preserved two versions. He writes: "Ctesias says that in India it is not permitted the king to get drunk. But among the Persians the king is allowed to get drunk on one day, that on which they sacrifice to Mithra. Duris, in the seventh book of his *Histories*, writes as follows: In only one of the festivals celebrated by the Persians, that to Mithra, the king gets drunk and dances "the Persian" (τὸ Περσικόν); no one else throughout Asia does this, but everyone abstains on this day from the dance. For Persians learn how to dance just as they learn to ride horseback; and they think the motion incident to this practice is very suitable for getting exercise to develop bodily strength." (*Deipnosophists* 10.45.434d-f; trl. C.B. Gulick, LCL). These passages are both paraphrased in Eustathius, *Ad Iliadem* 14.731 and *Ad Odysseam* 18.3.

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[55] Boyce, 'Iranian Festivals', 801-802; the Arsacid kings apparently changed the celebration of Nowruz and Mihragān, celebrating Mihragān on the spring equinox and Nowruz on the autumn equinox; cf. *ibid*., 805.

[56] Text e.g. in *CIMRM* 22; for an interpretation, *HZ* III, 259-260. There is also a badly preserved (very fragmentary) inscription from Galatia (Sarihüyük), which can not be safely interpreted, but contains references to "the Magi," "Mithras," and communal meals and feasts: S. Mitchell, *Regional Epigraphic Catalogue of Asia Minor II: The Ankara District. The Inscriptions of North Galatia* (British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monograph 4), Oxford 1981, no. 404.

[57] For the old Iranian tribute in general, cf. the various contributions to P. Briant & C. Herrenschmidt (eds.), *Le tribut dans l'empire perse*, Paris 1989; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Yaunā en Persai*, 145-183.

[58] *HZ* III, 260, n. 18.

Thus, according to these authors, essential elements of the festival of Mithrakāna were the bringing of gifts (Strabo), consumption of alcohol and dancing (the authorities quoted by Athenaeus). The festival was apparently of special importance for the king, who was allowed to get drunk and who danced alone. We know next to nothing about the status of dances in pre-Islamic Iran.[59] Dances were not part of known rituals. Merrymaking is a general part of all Zoroastrian festivals, and female dancers are represented on Sasanian silverware very regularly. In view of the absence of further references, we can say nothing on the "Persian dance" danced by the king on Mithrakāna.[60] Dancing was a prominent aspect of several Greek religious festivals, as was the drinking of wine.[61] Drunkenness, however, particularly in religious affairs, was considered unacceptable.[62]

The Greeks more often made a connection between the Persian king and the drinking of alcohol. There was a well-known story in Greek literature which claimed that Darius had written on his tomb that he was able to drink much wine and bear it well.[63] Consumption of alcohol is more often ascribed to the Persians in general. Herodotus already noticed their passion for wine (*Histories* 1.133) and indeed barbarian and Greek customs associated with the drinking of wine developed in Greek literature into one of the distinctive elements of culture — and degeneration.[64] The wine-drinking of the Persian king therefore needs to be seen not only in its possible genuine context, which will be discussed below, but also in the light of the Greek *topos* of the

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[59] A.Sh. Shahbazi, 'Dance I. In Pre-Islamic Iran', *EIr* 6 (1993), 640-641.

[60] There is a description of "the Persian" dance (a type of shield-dance) in Xenophon, *Anabasis* 6.1.10.

[61] For dancing as an element of rituals, cf. S.A. Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion*, Baltimore/London 1993.

[62] Versnel, *Inconsistencies I*, 156; 160.

[63] E.g. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 10.45.434d; for a discussion: R. Schmitt, 'Achaimenideninschriften in griechischer literarischer Überlieferung', in: *A Green Leaf. Papers in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen* (AI 28), Leiden 1988, 17-38.

[64] Cf. especially Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 4.145a-146d.

Persians as wine-lovers and the Persian king as a great consumer of alcoholic beverages.[65]

There is evidence, nevertheless, to suggest that Duris and Ctesias were—at least partly—correct. Getting drunk at festivals is also a recurrent theme in Zoroastrian literature. The *Nērangestān* devotes some chapters to the recitation of religious texts by a priest who has had too much to drink (*N.* 11-12 Kotwal-Kreyenbroek) and the Pahlavi commentaries place this in the context of the Gāhāmbār. Zartušt Bahrām Paždū mentions the fact that he was drunk at the festival of Ābān, which he would scarcely have referred to if this was considered shameful conduct; it did not, moreover, prevent him from copying the entire *Zarātuštnāmeh* in two days.[66] Wine is also used in various rituals and is described in the most positive terms, as something to be enjoyed in heaven.[67]

A.D.H. Bivar has rightly drawn attention to a passage in Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab*, where it is stated that it was customary among the Sasanians to drink wine on Mihragān.[68] There are many more passages on this custom, and on the great banquets and drinking-bouts at the royal courts during festivals, in Arabic and early Persian literature. Evidence for the wide spread of large banquets and drinking bouts also comes from works of art from the Parthian, Sasanian and early Islamic periods. The splendid so-called Parthian rhytons from Nisa, a capital of the Arsacid empire, undoubtedly were wholly unconnected with Zoroastrian rituals, but—as P. Bernard has shown—the high number of rhytons and the wear and tear they show suggest a prolonged usage at a Parthian court.[69] Also worthy of mention in this context is the increased attention for the wide spread and the use of drinking vessels among the Iranians.[70]

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[65] Compare the story of two pretenders to the throne, Cyrus and Artaxerxes; Cyrus writes to the Lacedemonians that "he carried a sturdier heart than his brother, was more of a philosopher, better versed in the wisdom of the Magi, and could drink and carry more wine than he" (Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 6.3, trl. B. Perrin, LCL).

[66] *ZN* 1549-1550.

[67] Ritual: *N.*10.5 (Kotwal-Kreyenbroek); 10.53 (Kotwal-Kreyenbroek); *PhlRDd* 20.3. Heaven: *Aog.* 16; *PhlRDd* 23.17 etc.

[68] Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab* 8.342; A.D.H. Bivar, 'The Royal Hunter and the Hunter God: Esoteric Mithraism under the Sasanians?', in Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 29-38, p. 32.

[69] The rhytons have been published by M.E. Masson & G.A. Pugacenkova, *The Parthian Rhytons from Nisa* (Monografie di Mesopotamia 1), Florence 1982. For indispensable improvements in the interpretation, cf. P. Bernard, 'Les rhytons de Nisa: à quoi, à qui ont-ils servi?', in: Bernard & Grenet (eds.), *Histoire et cultes*, 31-38; P. Chuvin, 'Fêtes grecques sur les rhytons de Nisa', *ibid.*, 23-29 (both with references).

Another element that is of importance for the interpretation of the passages from Duris and Ctesias (in Athenaeus) is the well-known royal practice that the king dines alone. Our earliest witness to this is also a passage in Athenaeus (*Deipnosophists* 4.145a-d), taken from the work of the historian Heraclides of Cymae. Heraclides is quoted to the effect that the king always dines and breakfasts alone. Those who dine with the king do not share a room with him, but the king sits in an adjacent room which is separated from the dining hall by a curtain through which the king can see his guests; the guests cannot see him. "Sometimes, however, on the occasion of a public holiday, all dine in a single room with the king, in the great hall."[71] The antiquity of the practice is unknown, but it is unlikely to have been a late Sasanian invention, among other things in the light of the passage from Heraclides. The practice is very well attested in Arabic literature.[72] A similarly well-attested practice is the suspension of the segregation of the king during festivals and the audiences the king gave on Nowrūz and Mihragān to administer justice.[73]

It is therefore questionable, whether the passages from Duris and Ctesias in Athenaeus reflect an authentic ritual observed by the Persian kings, or the fact that during Mihragān normal court etiquette was suspended, and that the king dined and feasted together with his close friends. Mihragān was a *public* occasion:

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[70] P.O. Harper, 'Luxury Vessels as Symbolic Images: Parthian and Sassanian Iran and Central Asia', in: Bernard & Grenet (eds.), *Histoire et cultes*, 95-100; A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, 'Les taureaux à vin et les cornes à boire de l'Iran islamique', *ibid.*, 101-125; *id.*, '*Rekāb*: The Polylobed Wine Boat from Sasanian to Saljuq Times', in: Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 187-204; *id.*, 'The Wine-Bull and the Magian Master', in: Ph. Gignoux (ed.), *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions. From Mazdaism to Sufism* (StIr Cahier 11), Paris 1992, 101-134. I am not a specialist in pre-Islamic art and therefore hesitate to draw any conclusions from these data. Melikian-Chirvani's interpretations of the wine as *replacement* for the blood of the bull, and of most vessels as *originally* having had a ritual function strikes me as fanciful. A.D.H. Bivar ('Royal Hunter', 32) apparently classifies the Sasanian silver plates as "drinking vessels", an interpretation rejected—correctly, it seems—by P.O. Harper ('Luxury Vessels', 96; cf. also P.O. Harper & P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period I: Royal Imagery*, New York 1981, *passim*).

[71] Athenaues, *Deipnosophists* 4.145c, trl. C.B. Gulick, LCL.

[72] Christensen, *Iran sous les Sassanides*, 402-407; S. Shaked, 'From Iran to Islam: On Some Symbols of Royalty', *JSAI* 7 (1986), 75-91; Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 5, n. 1. Cf. also F. Gabrieli, 'Etichetta di corte e costumi sāsānidi nel *Kitāb Aḫlāq al-Mulūk* di al-Ǧāḥiẓ', *RSO* 11 (1928), 292-305.

[73] Boyce, 'Iranian Festivals' 802-803.

the day on which gifts were exchanged and during which the king held a public festival at his court. Drinking alcohol and dancing were common occasions at Zoroastrian festivals, and the only difference at Mihragān may have been the fact that the king could actually be witnessed doing so. This, in combination with the Greek stereotypes of royal alcohol consumption among the Persians, may perhaps explain the otherwise baffling royal dance and royal drunkenness at Mithrakāna.

There are two other passages that appear to hint at the celebration of Mihragān, pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistula* 7.2 and an addition to Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography* 3.59, but they are very difficult to assess (cf. ch. 3.3.3; 4.1.4). Both Pseudo-Dionysius and (the scholiast to) Cosmas Indicopleustes refer to a festival in honour of Mithra that commemorates a creative act that is difficult to interpret. Reference is made to a miracle that took place in the reign of Hezekiah (*2 Kings* 20:8-11; cf. *Isaiah* 38:6-8; *2 Chronicles* 32:24). The ailing king Hezekiah asks Isaiah for a sign that will prove that he will be cured. The sun then withdraws ten steps on the stairs of Ahaz; these were used to measure time. The addition to Cosmas specifically mentions the fact that the Persians celebrate a festival in honour of Mithra to commemorate this event. Pseudo-Dionysius merely connects the story with a Persian festival for the "triple" Mithra. Whatever the reality is behind these two passages must remain uncertain, but two aspects of the festival are worthy of notice. The first is the fact that Persian festivals indeed draw part of their legitimation from the realm of commemoration, specifically of events from the cosmogony and from the heroic past.[74] The second aspect is Bīrūnī's information that on Mihragān "God spread out the world", referring—in Islamic terms (Ar. *daḥw*)—to the most important creative act, that made the earth increase in size and caused the heavenly lights to move. Similarly, Bīrūnī mentions the fact that God gave light to the moon on Mihragān. Other interpretations he knows of stress the complementarity of Nowrūz and Mihragān: Nowrūz refers to the beginning of the world, Mihragān to the resurrection. Nowrūz and Mihragān are the two festivals during which God made the treaty between light and darkness.[75] Clearly, elements of the cosmogony played an important role in some conceptions of Mihragān. One of these cosmogonical stories must have concerned the sun, Mithra's main symbol. The references found in Pseudo-Dionysius and the addition to Cosmas, may be an echo of some of the meanings some believers attached to Mihragān, for instance the idea that the day of Mithra commemorates the enlargement of the cosmos and the beginning of the sun's course.

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[74] Cf. S. Shaked, 'Mythes d'origine comme actes de commémoration et de différenciation en Iran Sasanide', in: Ph. Gignoux (ed.), *La commémoration* (Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études. Section des sciences religieuses 91), Louvain-Paris n.d. [1988], 211-218.

b) *Magophonia*

The festival called *Magophonia*, "the slaying of the Magus" (or "the slaying of the Magi"),[76] presents formidable problems and has therefore frequently been discussed.[77] It is mentioned by Herodotus, *Histories* 3.79, in the context of the story of the killing of the usurper pseudo-Smerdis (*Histories* 3.67-79). Herodotus relates that after the killing of the two Magi, Smerdis and Patizeithes, their heads were carried round; when the Persians found out what had happened, they became enraged; they searched everywhere to find Magi in order to kill them. If night had not come, there would not have been a single Magus left. Herodotus adds that the Persians still celebrate this day as their most holy festival, called the Magophonia. On this day, no Magus may go outdoors, but they all stay inside.

Similar information is given by Ctesias, who relates the following (in Photius, *Library* 72.38A): "The Persians celebrate the festival of the *Magophonia*, on [the day that] Sphendadatēs the Magus was killed."[78] Finally, Agathias gives a paraphrase of the story of pseudo-Smerdis in Herodotus, in his *Histories* 2.26, and adds the detail that on the day of the Magophonia "offerings of thanksgivings" are performed.[79] He explicitly, however, presents it as information concerning an age long gone, and consequently also as a festival that is no longer celebrated.

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[75] Sachau, *Chronology*, 208-209.

[76] In Herodotus' story, *two* Magi were killed, Smerdis and his brother Patizeithes. For a possible Iranian version of the word (Sgd. *mwγy̌zt-*; used in reference to the killing of priests by Alexander), cf. W.B. Henning, 'The Murder of the Magi', *JRAS* 1944, 133-144 (= *Selected Papers* II, 139-150).

[77] For a survey of opinions, cf. F. Gschnitzer, *Die sieben Perser und das Königtum des Dareios: ein Beitrag zur Achaimenidengeschichte und zur Herodotanalyse* (SBHeidelberg, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 1977.3), Heidelberg 1977; M. Dandamaev, *Persien unter den ersten Achaemeniden*, 137-140; F. Altheim & R. Stiehl, *Die aramäische Sprache unter den Achaimeniden*, Frankfurt 1960, 99-102; *HZ* II, 86-88; J. Wiesehöfer, *Der Aufstand Gaumātas und die Anfänge Dareios' I.*, Bonn 1978, 175-178; E.J. Bickerman & H. Tadmor, 'Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis, and the Magi', *Athenaeum* 56 (1978), 239-261.

[78] On Ctesias' name for the killed Magus, cf. Dandamaev, *Persien*, 110-112, with additional material (from Cedrenus) in n. 454.

The links between the events surrounding Darius' rise to the throne (the killing of Gaumāta) and the festival of the Magophonia have been defended and rejected several times. The comparison of Herodotus' version of the events and of Darius' own version, in the Behistūn inscription—in which the killing of Magi is not mentioned at all—has convinced many scholars that the events related by Herodotus are part of the oral transformation of early Achaemenian history and do not reflect the "actual" events, nor describe a genuine festival.[80] Others, though not rejecting the idea of a festival connected with Darius' rise to the throne entirely, do reject the idea that the Magi were not allowed to go outside on one day of the year.[81] Bickerman and Tadmor have offered interesting Babylonian parallels for this practice, connected with days of bad fortune, and seem to suggest that it was actually practised, even though they argue that the murder of the Magi never took place.[82]

Evidently, the currently available sources for this festival are insufficient to solve these problems. There are several accounts of the story of the pseudo-Smerdis and they do not agree with each other in many important respects. The agreement within the main sources—Darius' Behistūn-inscription; Herodotus; Ctesias—does not go beyond the level of common elements from well-known stories.[83]

The date of the killing of Gaumāta is given by Darius as the tenth of the month of Bāgayādi (DB I.55-56). If, as seems likely, the month of Bāgayādi was the month of the festival of Mithra, the killing of Gaumāta may indeed have coincided with Mithrakāna. This association with Mithrakāna has been suggested long ago by Marquart, and has since been defended and attacked various times.[84] Boyce compared the Magophonia with Guy Fawkes' Day, which commemorates the attempt by a Roman Catholic man to blow up Parliament, and which survived due to its proximity to an earlier autumn festival.[85] There are thus many possible interpretations and associations with the Magophonia, but until new evidence comes to light, one can only speculate on the nature of this festival. We do not know when it was celebrated, we do not know when the celebrations ceased and we do not know how it was celebrated, apart from the fact that the Magi could not participate.[86]

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[79] Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sassanians', 86-87. The name Agathias uses for the Magus, Smerdis, indicates most likely that he indeed used Herodotus as his source, rather than Ctesias, who is said by Photius to have called the Magus Sphendadates; but cf. A. Cameron, 'Herodotus and Thucydides in Agathias', *BZ* 57 (1964), 33-52, for the problems involved.

[80] The most eloquent of critics is Dandamaev, *Persien*, 137-140.

[81] *HZ* II, 86-88.

[82] 'Darius I, pseudo-Smerdis and the Magi', 256.

[83] Bickerman & Tadmor, 'Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis, and the Magi', *passim*; J.M. Balcer, *Herodotus and Bisutūn*, *passim*.

c) *Sakaia*[87]

The most elaborately described festival of the Persians in Classical literature is the festival known as the Sakaia (Sacaea). The word appears to be based on the Old Persian name for the Scythians, *saka-*, although this etymology has often been rejected. As Boyce and Grenet have pointed out, however, it is also the common explanation for the word among Greek authors. It not only underlies one of Strabo's descriptions of the festival (*Geography* 11.8.5), but is also explicitly given by Dio Chrysostomus ("the festival of the Sakas") and in Hesychius' *Lexicon* s.v. Sakaia: "the Scythian Festival".[88] This may be a popular etymology which obscures the "genuine" appellation for the festival, but the etymologies proposed so far (Akk. *sakku*, "fool"; Ir. **Tīra-yāzaka*)[89] appear less convincing. OP **saka-* must also be assumed in the meaning "dog" (attested by Herodotus in its "Median" form *spaka*, *Hist*. 1.110), but it is unlikely that this would have been the basis of the word.[90]

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[84] For references, cf. Eilers, *Alte Name*, 27-28.

[85] *HZ* II, 88. Boyce rejects the interpretation of Bāgayādi as "month of the worship to the Baga (who is Mithra)." Cf. *ibid.*, 24. All her objections, however, have been countered by Sims-Williams, 'Mithra the Baga', *passim*.

[86] For an etymological attempt at explanation, cf. Eilers, *Alte Name*, 27-30, who suggests that a misinterpretation of the festival known as *bagakāna-* (misunderstood as **maga-kana*, meaning "killing the Magus") was the origin of the Magophonia.

[87] Cf. L.H. Gray, 'Festivals and Fasts (Iranian)', *ERE* 5, 872-875; S. Langdon, 'The Babylonian and Persian Sacaea', *JRAS* 1924, 65-72; H. Ringgren, 'Esther and Purim', *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 20 (1956), 5-24 (repr. in: C.A. Moore (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Esther*, New York 1982, 185-204); *HZ* III, 289-292. For the treatment of the festival in comparison with related phenomena, cf. J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough III: The Dying God*, London 1911, 113-118; H. Kenner, *Das Phänomen der verkehrten Welt in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, Klagenfurt 1970, 82-86; H.S. Versnel, *Triumphus. An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph*, Leiden 1970, 217-219; *id.*, *Inconsistencies II*, 210-211.

[88] *HZ* III, 291 with nn. 167 and 168.

[89] The etymology on Akk *sakku*, 'fool', was suggested by Langdon, 'Babylonian and Persian Sacaea', 72; the etymology on Ir **Tīra-yāzaka* (the worship of Tīri) can be found in Eilers, *Alte Name*, 27.

The descriptions given of the festival vary considerably. What is more, the festival is generally treated in connection with more or less comparable phenomena from the ancient world, particularly from Mesopotamia and from the Graeco-Roman world. Recently, however, an interpretation based on certain assumptions concerning the religion of the Scythians has been formulated that deserves careful consideration.

There are four different descriptions of the Sakaia, two by Strabo and one each by Dio Chrysostomus and Athenaeus (quoting Berossus). Strabo gives two different versions. In *Geography* 11.8.4.512, he writes the following: "But when they (i.e. the Sakas, A.J.) were holding a general festival and enjoying their booty, they were attacked by night by Persian generals who were then in that region and utterly wiped out. And these generals, heaping up a mound of earth over a certain rock in the plain, completed it in the form of a hill, and erected on it a wall, and established the temple of Anaïtis and the gods who share her altar—Omanus and Anadatus, Persian deities; and they instituted an annual sacred festival, the Sacaea, which the inhabitants of Zela (for thus the place is called) continue to celebrate to the present day." (trl. H.L. Jones, LCL)

In 11.8.5.512, Strabo adds some other details: "Others say that Cyrus made an expedition against the Sacae, was defeated in battle, and fled; but that he had encamped in the place where he had left behind his supplies, which consisted of an abundance of everything and especially of wine, rested his army a short time, and set out at nightfall, as though he were in flight, leaving the tents full of supplies; and that he proceeded as far as he thought best and halted; and that the Sacae pursued, found the camp empty of men but full of things conducive to enjoyment, and filled themselves to the full; and that Cyrus turned back, and found them drunk and crazed, so that some were slain while lying stupefied and asleep, whereas others fell victims to the arms of the enemy while dancing and revelling naked, and almost all perished; and Cyrus, regarding the happy issue as of divine origin, consecrated that day to the goddess of his fathers and called it Sacaea; and that wherever there is a temple of this goddess, there the festival of the Sacaea, a kind of Bacchic festival, is the custom, at which men, dressed in the Scythian garb, pass day and night drinking and playing wantonly with one another, and also with the women who drink with them." (trl. H.L. Jones, LCL)

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[90] Cf. A. Ivanõik, 'Les guerriers-chiens: loups-garous et invasions scythes en Asie Mineure', *RHR* 210 (1993), 305-329, p. 316.

Quite different is the festival described by Dio Chrysostomus, *Oration* 4.66-67: "(Diogenes is speaking to Alexander) 'Have you not heard of the festival of the Sacaia, which is celebrated by the Persians, against whom you are eager to make an expedition?' Alexander, who wished to know everything about the Persians, at once asked: 'What kind of festival is it?' Diogenes replied: 'They take one of the prisoners who are under sentence of death, set him on a king's throne, give him the king's clothes and allow him to give orders and to drink and indulge himself and to consort with the king's concubines during the days of the festival, nobody offering any opposition to his doing anything he pleases. After this they strip him and scourge him and then impale him." (trl. J.W. Cohoon, LCL)

Finally—though chronologically it is the earliest reference—Athenaeus quotes the Babylonian priest and scholar Berossos as follows (*Deipnosophists* 14.44.639C): "Berosus, in the first book of his Babylonian History, says that in the month Lōos, on the sixteenth day, there was held in Babylon a feast called Sacaia, extending over five days, wherein it was customary for the masters to be ruled by their slaves, and one of them, as leader of he household, was clothed in a robe similar to the king's; he was called the *zōganēs*. The festival is mentioned also by Ctesias in the second book of his Persian History." (trl. C.B. Gulick, LCL).

There thus seem to be some common aspects to the festival, as well as some isolated elements that are only found in one of the sources. The main common element is that the festival was one of the many "rites of reversal" that were observed in the ancient world.[91] Thus, we learn that men dress up in "Scythian" clothes and dance and play together with women, which undoubtedly was a departure from normal life; that slaves ruled their masters and that a mock king was appointed, overseeing the festivities. It is impossible to check details here, for the Zoroastrian sources are completely silent on this festival. Nevertheless, there are some materials that have been collected to interpret the festival in this respect. According to a Chinese traveller from the seventh century CE, the Soghdians had the custom of appointing kings for a day as overseers of the festivities.[92] There are also some Armenian sources hinting at an "obscene" festival, although the evidence is very late and speculative and a connection with Anahit is nowhere apparent.[93] In a culture where the male and female domains are as a rule segregated, a communal dance of men and women will sometimes be enough to be interpreted as an unacceptable obscenity. To the Yezidis, for instance, the following festival is attributed: "the Leader of the Feqîrs [...] puts on a crown and stole, being helped to do so by bystanders. When he is dressed, the people take off their clothes and dance for three hours. Then they stop, and the Head Feqîr removes his crown, which is put away until the next year. Donations are then demanded and given."[94] Two elements of this ritual are reminiscent of the Sacaea: the appointed king of the festival and the communal dancing. That men and women would dance naked together, is unacceptable in Yezīdī culture, and corroboration of the existence of the festival cannot be given.[95]

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[91] For this phenomenon, cf. Versnel, *Inconsistencies II*, 115-121; a very full discussion (and bibliography) can be found in C. Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang: "Schöpfung" in Mythos und Ritual im alten Orient und in Griechenland am Beispiel der Odyssee und des Ezechielbuches* (RVV 39), Berlin/New York 1991.

The origins of the festival are a mystery; our earliest witness, Berossus, locates it in Babylon, but since this was the area where his main interests lay, this does not necessarily indicate the origins of the festival.[96] Athenaeus adds, moreover, that Ctesias has written about the festival, which suggests that it was also current among the Persians in his time. Strabo attributes the festival to the Persians, and provides it with an etiological story: the festival was introduced after a victory over the Scythians. Grenet has drawn attention to some artistic representations of a Scythian festival dedicated, in all likelihood, to the Scythian goddess Artimpasa. He suggests that this Scythian festival remained current in Eastern Anatolia and was adopted by Zoroastrians who rededicated it to Anāhitā.[97]

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[92] *HZ* III, 290.

[93] J.R. Russell, 'The word *chragamah* and the Rites of the Armenian Goddess', *JSAS* 5 (1990-1991), 157-172. Notice also the "obscene" dances witnessed by Boyce during a Zoroastrian wedding: *Stronghold*, 174.

[94] Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 155 (quoting Ishak of Bartella). The demanding and giving of donations evokes the image of another Iranian rite of reversal, viz. the festival of *kūseh bar-nišīn* (Ar. *rukūb al-kūsaj*), during which a young man (sometimes said to be a mentally handicapped man) was dressed up as a king and rode a horse through the village, complaining of the heat. People would throw snow and ice at him, and at every shop he demanded a donation. If such a donation was refused, he had the right to blacken the shopkeeper's face with soot. The donations received in the morning were for the king, those received in the afternoon for the young man himself. If he would show himself after sunset, he would be molested. Bīrūnī, *Chronology* 211, merely hints at such a festival. For more literature on the festival and its modern continuation, cf. A. Krasnowolska, 'Some Heroes of Iranian Calendar Mythology', *PSECIS*, 371-382.

[95] Thus Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 155 with n. 96 on p. 166.

[96] *HZ* III, 290; in earlier scholarly literature, a connection is regularly made between the Sacaea and the Babylonian New Year festival *akītu* (thus Langdon, 'Babylonian and Persian Sacaea'). This connection is currently rejected by most

Such an interpretation has its attractions. It cannot account, however, for the description of the festival given by Dio Chrysostomus. Dio and Berossus are agreed on one aspect: the temporary king wears the royal robe (or one similar to it). The theme of wearing the royal robe is well developed in classical literature: whoever wears the royal mantle is king.[98] But the fate of the "king" is different in both accounts. Berossus (who gives the word for "king" as ζωγάνης, a hitherto unexplained word) does not mention the fate of the king, but Dio is quite explicit: the king is recruited from among convicted criminals and he is killed after the festival.

Rituals involving substitute kings are well known from the ancient Near East. They are generally connected with periods of bad fortune. When an inauspicious period or situation for the king is suspected or predicted, he may be replaced by a commoner who takes up his seat on the throne and wears the royal *insignia*. After the period has elapsed, he is killed.[99] The institution of the substitute king (Akk. šar pūḫi) is particularly known from the Neo-Assyrian period. There are some traces of the custom in the Greek traditions on Alexander, who encountered to his amazement a silent substitute king on his throne in Babylon.[100] There is an evident parallel between the Sacaea as described by Dio Chrysostomus and these Babylonian rituals of substitute kings. Since Dio's version of the festival is also con-

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specialists, because most details of the Sacaea did not form part of the *akītu*-celebrations, for which cf. Van der Toorn, 'The Babylonian New Year Festival'.

[97] *HZ* III, 291-292.

[98] H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Exit Atossa: Images of Women in Greek Historiography on Persia', in: A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity*, London 1983, 20-33, p. 29.

[99] Cf. J. Bottéro, *Mésopotamie, L'écriture, la raison et les dieux*, Paris 1987, 170-190; H.M. Kümmel, *Ersatzrituale für den hethitischen König* (Studien zu den Boğazköy-texten 3), Wiesbaden 1967, *passim*.

[100] Plutarch, *Alexander* 73-74; Arrian 7.24; Diodorus Siculus 17.116; cf. Kümmel, *Ersatzrituale*, 184-186, for a commentary.

cerned with Alexander, he may have confused two distinct rituals: the rites of the substitute king, which were enacted when the need arose, and the festival of the Sacaea, which was celebrated every year at the same date. There are no indications that the rituals connected with substitute kings were recurrent events based on fixed dates of the calendar. Dio's description of the festival would require a particular royal version of it: instead of the appointment of a mock king as overseer of the festival, the real king was replaced. This also clashes with the descriptions of the other authors, who describe the Sacaea as a popular festival, involving all men and women. Whereas there is evidence to suggest that such a common festival was indeed celebrated, it should be distinguished from the rituals of the royal replacements.

d) *"The removal of Evil"*

Agathias, finally, mentions a festival which is called "the removal of evil" (ἡ τῶν κακῶν ἀναίϱεσις, an alternative translation could be "the killing of the evil things"; *Historiae* 2.24). During this festival, which is said to be the most important one of the year, everyone goes out and kills as many snakes and other evil creatures as possible. These creatures are brought before the Magi as a token of piety.

The existence of such a tradition—without it being called a festival—was also recorded by Plutarch, *De Iside* 46 and possibly by Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus* 27.832a (cf. ch. 4.4.3). The name of the festival Agathias gives is reminiscent of the festival known as *xarastar-košī*, "the killing of *xrafstras*" (under which name the evil creatures are generally known). This festival is otherwise known from late sources only.[101] It came under the protection of Spenta Ārmaiti, goddess of the Earth. Bīrūnī's description of her festival does not refer to the practice at all. He only refers to the fact that the festival for Ārmaiti was a festival for women (called *možd-gīrān*, "the taking of good tidings") and that during the festival amulets against scorpions were made.[102]

e) *Nowrūz?*

The celebration of Nowrūz, the Iranian new year, is probably the most important event of the year in many Iranian cultures.[103] It is therefore unsettling that no clear reference to this festival is to be found in the Greek or Latin texts.[104] Several scholars have attempted to show the existence of Nowrūz in Achaemenian Iran, but the evidence for the celebration of a new year festival is meagre, and—especially with regard to the Achaemenian period—suggests imitation of Babylonian celebrations rather than an Iranian religious festival.[105] In spite of some spectacular claims and reconstructions (the appellation of the spring new year as "new day" by Zarathustra himself;[106] the invention of mythic-heroic rituals symbolising the fight between the king and a dragon),[107] there is no evidence for the celebration of Nowrūz in the Achaemenian period. For later periods, there is hardly any evidence at all in Classical literature, even though there are several important Arabic descriptions of the festival.[108] Traces of Nowrūz in Zoroastrian literature are not very frequent, but do presuppose the popularity of the festival.[109] There is reasonably good information on the celebrations of Nowrūz in the late Sasanian and early Islamic periods—and of course very extensive documentation of the current practice—but it is difficult to project these many New Year customs back into the Achaemenian period.[110] Earlier scholars have interpreted the reliefs in Persepolis as the representation of the Nowrūz-festivities, but this idea is now considered untenable.[111]

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[101] Firby, *European Travellers*, 52; Boyce, *Stronghold*, 202; *HZ* I, 299.

[102] *Chronology*, 216; *Āthār*, 229-230.

[103] The festival is known under different names. The current name, NP *now*

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rūz, means "new day." In several other languages, it is called "New Year" (here the evidence of month-names is important: Sgd *nʾwsrδyc*; Arm *nawasardi*). The name has not, however, been attested for OP; it is absent from the OP calendar.

[104] As also no trace has been preserved of the *Gāhāmbār*, the Gāthā-festivals, although these are considered to have been the core of the Zoroastrian religious year.

[105] An excellent overview is A. Kuhrt, 'Usurpation, Conquest and Ceremonial: From Babylon to Persia', in: D. Cannadine & S. Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge 1987 (1992^2), 20-55.

[106] *HZ* I, 175 with n. 186.

[107] Most elaborately in Widengren, *Religionen*, 41-49.

[108] Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, 199-204.

[109] *WZ* 20.1 mentions the festival in passing. The tractate *Māh ī Frawardīn rōz ī Xordād* (*PhlT* 102-108) is entirely devoted to the day of the Greater Nowrūz, a day which people "consider greater and better and dearer than all other days" (*az abārīg rōzīhā pad meh ud weh ud grāmīgtar dārēnd*).

[110] The contemporary celebrations, however, show traces of indebtedness to the Babylonian New Year-festival. A good example is the celebration of *sīzdah bedar*, the closing day of the New Year celebrations. This takes places at the thirteenth day of the new year and is celebrated by going out of the city and having a family picknick. This duration of the celebrations is thought to be a remnant of the Babylonian *akītu*-festival: for references, cf. *HZ* II, 34.

[111] Cf. for instance C. Nylander, 'Al-Bērūnī and Persepolis', *Commémoration*

There is only one passage in Graeco-Roman literature that refers to a custom associated with Nowrūz. Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.17, writes: "And they celebrate their weddings at the beginning of the spring-equinox." The spring-equinox is Nowrūz. That marriages are celebrated at Nowrūz is a well-established Iranian tradition, which is still current among the Persian Zoroastrians and Iranians in general.[112]

Cyrus. Hommage universel I (AI 1), Téhéran-Liège 1974, 137-150; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Nowruz in Persepolis', *AchHist* VII (1991), 173-201; M.C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art. Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (*AI* 19), Leiden 1979, 156-157; 278-279.

[112] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 172-174.

7. *Priests*

1. *Magi*

The subject that poses most problems in the realm of disentangling possibly genuine Iranian from internal Greek information is undoubtedly the complex of words relating to the Magi, such as μάγος, μαγεία, μαγικός, μαγεύω etc. These words derive from the Old Persian appellative for a priest *magu-* (nom. *maguš*), etymologically related to Av. *moγu-* which appears to have meant "(member of a) tribe".[1] The words are used in Greek and Latin (where *magus* is undoubtedly a loanword from Greek) in at least two distinct meanings. They either denote (the activities of) Persian priests, or (the activities of) sorcerers, quacks, magicians. Although Greek had a native word for the latter category, γόης,[2] the complex of words relating to the Magi was at least as common to denote those engaged in such activities as influencing the weather or evoking the spirits of the dead.[3]

An important obstacle to our understanding of the development of the word μάγος in Greek is the unexpected antiquity of its use in a derogatory sense. Whereas Herodotus mainly describes the Magi in terms of their Iranian functions, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides, already use μάγος and related words with pejorative meanings; in the tragedies, these words give the impression of already belonging to the common Greek vocabulary. Another possible early witness to this usage is Heraclitus, fragment 14, although the authenticity of this fragment is debated. It is found in Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 22.2, and mentions Magi together with various people who engage in nightly or ecstatic, Bacchic, rituals.[4] It seems unlikely that the presence of the Magi in this list can be used either in favour or against the authenticity of the passage, precisely because the word μάγος had acquired the pejorative connotations already in Heraclitus' time.[5] If we accept that the word had already acquired its negative colouring in the fifth century BCE, this raises the question of linguistic contacts between Greek and Iranian before that period.[6] Given the wide spread of the word in the fifth century BCE, the word must have been borrowed into Greek no later than the sixth century BCE.[7] It is, however, wholly unknown what the Iranian word meant in that period, although there has been no shortage of speculations.

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[1] For these matters, cf. E. Benveniste, *Les mages dans l'ancien Iran*, *passim*; *HZ* I, 10-11. The status of Gk μάγος as an Iranian loan-word is occasionally doubted (e.g. C. Colpe, *CHI* 3, 827). For lexicographical treatments of the word, cf. R. Renehan, *Greek Lexicographical Notes II* (Hypomnemata 74), Göttingen 1982, 97 and G. Delling, 'μάγος, μαγεία, μαγεύω' *ThWNT* 4, 360-365. For an introductory survey, cf. especially A.D. Nock, 'Paul and the Magus', *Essays* 308-330; conventional overviews (largely outdated, but still sometimes influential) can also be found in Moulton, *EZ*, 182-253; J.H. Kramers, 'De Magiërs en hun boodschap', in: *Analecta Orientalia* I, Leiden 1954, 331-341. The Magi are of course discussed at length in all histories of Zoroastrianism.

[2] For which, cf. Burkert, 'ΓΟΗΣ: Zum griechischen Schamanismus', *passim*.

[3] Burkert has drawn attention to the fact that according to the grammarian Phrynichus the word *goēs* was considered "more Attic" than the word *magos*: 'ΓΟΗΣ: Zum griechischen Schamanismus', 38, n. 12. The two words are frequently discussed together, even in older Greek literature, for instance Gorgias, *Helena* 10.

These speculations are concerned with the general reconstructions of the history of Iranian religions discussed in chapter 2. There are some trends in the reconstruction of the traditions of the Magi that may be discerned: in earlier scholarly literature, the wish to preserve a pure, rationalistic, non-legalistic and non-ritualistic religious tradition to which the name of Zarathustra should be attached, led to a tendency to attribute everything that runs counter to this image of a "pure" Zoroastrianism to the influence of the Magi. The religion of the Magi was sometimes even introduced as a "non-Aryan" substratum of the Iranian religion;[8] otherwise, the putative Median origin of the Magi was invoked to account for their deleterious effects on the development of Zoroastrianism.[9] In the latter case, the arguments have centred around the prescriptions found in the Vendīdād.

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[4] For text and bibliography, cf. Papatheophanes, 'Heraclitus of Ephesus, the Magi, and the Achaemenids', 101-107.

[5] Thus Burkert, 'ΓΟΗΣ: Zum griechischen Schamanismus', 38, n. 12, and see below. Papatheophanes' objections ('Heraclitus of Ephesus', 105, n. 27) do not carry much weight. For the use of the words in the early tragedies, cf. K.J. Rigsby, 'Teiresias as Magus in *Oedipus Rex*', *GRBS* 17 (1976), 109-114.

[6] Sometimes very early linguistic contacts are suggested between Greek and Iranian, a.o. on the basis of the Greek and Iranian words for "rose" (Gk ῥόδον, Ir **varda-* > NP *gol*). For references, cf. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 123-124. For some of the problems involved here, cf. W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution. Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, Cambridge MA/ London 1992, 33-40; for the words for rose, cf. also J.P. Brown, 'The Sacrificial Cult and its Critique in Greek and Hebrew II', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 25 (1980), 1-21, pp. 18-19.

[7] As argued at various places by Burkert; cf. for instance 'Iranisches bei Anaximandros', 122-123; 'ΓΟΗΣ. Zum griechischen Schamanismus', 38-39.

[8] Moulton, *EZ*, 182-194; Moulton argues for an "aboriginal" (i.e. non-Indo-European *and* non-Semitic) origin of the Magi and their religious practices. At pains to deny the possibility of an Indo-European culture practising the abominations attributed to the Magi, Moulton argues that these "aboriginal" Magi were used by the Medes and the Persians as their religious functionaries, special-

It had long been recognised that the characteristics Herodotus (*Histories* 1.140) attributes to the Magi—their observance of the rites of exposure and their killing of noxious creatures—were typical of the evolved Zoroastrianism we encounter in the Pahlavi books and in the *Vendīdād*. Any interpretation of these two fragments of the history of Iranian religions can take two directions: either the Magi were Zoroastrians, because they observed typically Zoroastrian customs, or these customs were part of the religious traditions of the Magi and—with the conversion of Magi to Zoroastrianism—were brought into that faith because the Magi would not let go of these traditions. The latter view has prevailed until recently: in most reconstructions, the Vendīdād is regarded as the Magian perversion of a pure Zoroastrianism, which originally did not comprise the strange legalistic details and curious prescriptions one encounters in parts of the Avesta. The fact that the Vendīdād is generally regarded as late (that is contemporary with or later than the Achaemenian period) has further contributed to this view.

A similar scheme of things—Magi being responsible for dualism, polytheism, ritualism etc.—can be found in theories that pay less attention to the purported Median origin of the Magi, and more to their pre-Zoroastrian religiosity.[10] Gershevitch, for instance, rather than presenting the Magi as an inferior aboriginal race (as did Moulton) or Median zealots (as did Widengren), presents the Magi as disinterested career-hunters, who were not concerned with doctrinal niceties, but merely wanted to perform as many rituals as possible—no questions asked—in order to acquire as much material gain as they could get.[11]

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ising in shamanistic rituals; they were an "inferior race" who enjoyed privileges as "powerful shamans" etc. Moulton's attempts are not only excessive and racist, but also fail to accomodate the available evidence.

[9] E.g. Widengren, *Religionen*, 111-114 and *passim*; Nyberg, *Religionen*, 335-343.

[10] For example Gershevitch, 'Zoroaster's Own Contribution'; Gnoli, *ZTH*, 206-219.

[11] Gershevitch, 'Zoroaster's own Contribution', 25: "The Magi would be, not the representatives of one particular religion, but technical experts of worship, professional priests who, equipped with barsman twigs and all the paraphernalia of a meticulous ritual, would conduct the service of any Iranian god to whom an employer willing to pay them should wish to render homage."

Yet other speculations made the "original" Magi priests of the ancient *daēva*-worshipping religion, or the ancient religion of the Medes which accommodated the divine beings later to become *daēvas* (Indra, Saurva etc.).[12] It has also been suggested that the Magi were not priests at all, but were "only wizards in Achaemenid Persia."[13] Finally, the view has been expressed that the Magi had always been the main representatives of Zoroastrianism in Western Iran; at least, that all evidence we have refers to Zoroastrian Magi.[14]

Some of the views mentioned above are clearly excessive. There is no reason to assume that the Magi were not Iranians. There is not much to suggest that all Magi were Medes (see below) and nothing permits us to suggest that they are responsible for the contents of parts of the Avesta. The argument that the Vendīdād is late and therefore may reflect the traditions of the Magi is specious; the only thing one can say with any certainty is that the Vendīdād in the version known to us is a "late" text: the redaction of the Vendīdād as a textual unit may be dated in the late Achaemenian period, but this is far from settling the date of its contents. With regard to the *daēva*-worshipping religion as the religion of the Magi, all sources fail us. That the Magi were not priests depends on one's definition of the category "priest." They certainly were the main (possibly the only) religious specialists in the realm, and had ritual and theology as their special domains of interest. However one prefers to call them, they certainly were not "only wizards in Achaemenid Persia." The arguments advanced by Bickerman and Tadmor to sustain this unlikely reconstruction lack substance.[15]

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[12] For references, cf. Papatheophanes, 'Heraclitus', 107-108; Nyberg, *Religionen*, 338-343; A. Christensen, *Essai sur la démonologie iranienne*, København 1941, 25-38.

[13] Bickerman & Tadmor, 'Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis, and the Magi', 251-261; also Papatheophanes, 'Heraclitus of Ephesus, the Magi, and the Achaemenids', *passim*.

[14] G. Messina, *Der Ursprung der Magier und die zarathuštrische Religion*, Roma 1930 (but cf. R. Pettazzoni, 'Les Mages et l'origine du Zoroastrisme', *RHR* 103 (1931), 144-150); similarly Molé, *CMC*, 76-81.

[15] Particularly the unlikely notion that a priest can only be someone who mediates between God and the worshipper (p. 254). There is no evidence that the word *magu-* and cognates could denote the activities of a sorcerer in any Iranian language or in any Iranian religious system. Sorcery, of course, is not a value-free term; interpreting dreams, appeasing a storm, picking sacrificial victims, drawing horoscopes do not *per se* indicate the activities of sorcerers.

This leaves us with the possibility that the Magi were Zoroastrians. Here as well, no conclusive arguments can be adduced. The customs Herodotus ascribes to the Magi are typical of Zoroastrianism. The rites of exposure are typical of Eastern Iranian and Central Asian traditions and not of Western Iran.[16] Western Iranians appear to have practised inhumation and other funerary customs for centuries alongside the rites of exposure (cf. ch. 4.8.3). The killing of noxious creatures (*xrafstras*, for which cf. ch. 4.4.3) is also typical of evolved Zoroastrianism. It is not only ordered in the Avesta and ascribed to the Magi in Classical literature, but it is also mentioned as part of the culture of the *Kambojas* in Sanskrit literature, behind whom we may discern Zoroastrian speakers of Iranian languages.[17] The killing of *xrafstras*, moreover, fits well into the structure of Zoroastrianism, with its emphasis on dualism and its typical doctrine of the immanence of the ethical divine split in creation. It is unknown whether such ideas were also current among the pre-Zoroastrian Western Iranians. The Magi in Herodotus, *Histories* 1.140, are therefore best regarded as Zoroastrian priests.[18] But in other passages, there may be references to non-Zoroastrian Magi. It is, however, impossible to reconstruct the religion of these pre-Zoroastrian Magi on the basis of any textual evidence.

The idea that the Magi were "only" ritual specialists finds little support from the Greek or from the Old Persian and Elamite evidence. In the earliest relevant Greek texts, the Magi are presented not only as ritual or religious specialists, but also as court functionaries, advisers to the king, dream-interpreters, diviners etc. The main source of information here is Herodotus. He is also the author who is responsible for the common view that the Magi were originally a Median tribe. In *Histories* 1.101, Herodotus sums up the tribes (γένεα) of the Medes: Bousai, Parētakēnoi, Strouchates, Arizantoi, Boudioi and Magoi. All names except that of the Magi have so far defied interpretation.[19] Since the Avestan cognate of the OP word *magu-* appears to mean "(member of a) tribe," the possibility that the word *magu-* in this sense was somehow confused with the name of an actual tribe must be seriously entertained. In that case, the Median origin of the Magi as a section of Iranian society becomes much less evident. The Median origin of the word (and of the function) finds support from the Babylonian version of Darius' *Behistūn*-inscription, where Gaumāta the Magus is glossed as "the Mede" (*ma-da*).[20] That Gaumāta was of Median extraction, however, is not very likely, if only for the fact that Darius would certainly have mentioned a Median attempt to recapture the sovereignty over the "Persian" empire.[21]

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[16] *HZ* I, 113-114; Grenet, *Pratiques funéraires*, *passim*.

[17] *HZ* III, 129-130.

[18] Thus already Molé, *CMC*, 77; Boyce, *HZ* II, 182-183; *HZ* III, 130.

[19] An attempt at interpretation can be found in Nyberg, *Religionen*, 335-336; for a pessimistic view, cf. Benveniste, *Mages dans l'ancien Iran*, 17. Against interpreting 'Αριζαντοί as deriving from _*ariya-zantu-_ (thus, a.o., Benveniste, *ibid.*; the appellative may have been preserved in El. *Har-ri-za-an-du-iš*, *OnPers* 8.478), cf. R. Schmitt, 'Medisches und persisches Sprachgut', 137, n. 145.

What is striking in Herodotus' *Histories* is the familiarity the book suggests with the word *magos*. Nowhere does Herodotus introduce the Magi in order to explain them to his audience. By contrast, the Scythian diviners, the Enarees (*Histories* 1.105; 4.67) are introduced and explained.[22] In his descriptions of other religions, Herodotus uses Greek terms for religious functionaries (e.g. Egyptian priests). This suggests that the category of Magus was familiar to his audience. Such an impression is enhanced by another early reference to the Magi, from Xanthus' *Lydian History*, part of which was known under the title "On the Magi."[23] Diogenes Laertius (1.2) has preserved the following fragment from this section: "Xanthus the Lydian says that six-thousand years passed from the time of Zoroaster up to the crossing of Xerxes, and that after him there have been many Magi in succession, (with names such as) Ostanes, Astrampsychus, Gobryas and Pazatas, until the conquest of the Persians by Alexander." The latter part of this fragment cannot possibly be by Xanthus, because he lived long before Alexander; the names of the Magi, moreover, undoubtedly represent those of the most famous Magi and Persians in Greek literary traditions. There are reasons to assume that the first part of the fragment is authentic.[24] The fragment of Xanthus in Diogenes has been discussed many times, because of the dating of Zoroaster it contains.[25] For the present section, however, what is important is the stress placed upon the role of the Magi as followers of Zoroaster, and the *succession* (διαδοχή) of Magi. This recalls the fact that priesthood in Zoroastrianism was hereditary and suggests that in the fifth century BCE there already were Magi in Lydia who claimed that they were the successors of Zoroaster.

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[20] E.N. von Voigtlander, *The Bisutun Inscription of Darius the Great. Babylonian Version* (*CII* 1.2.1), London 1978, line 15 on p.14.

[21] In Herodotus' *Histories* 3.73, Gobryas does refer to Smerdis as a Mede. For evidence for the Persian origin of Gaumāta, cf. *HZ* II, 78-86. It has been argued that the fact that Gaumāta was qualified as a Magus would have been enough to suggest to the Persians that he was a Mede, if the Magi indeed were all Medes. Since this relies on Herodotus' testimony only, and is nowhere else reflected, the argument is partly circular and contradicted by all other evidence. The later Greek references to the Magi as inhabitants of Media (as for instance Stephanus Byzantinus, *Ethnicon* p. 424,13 Meineke) are doubtless inspired by Herodotus.

[22] For a recent *status quaestionis* with regard to the Enarees, cf. M. Donath, *Skythische Schamanen?*, Diss. Zürich 1993.

[23] For the authenticity of the fragment, cf. Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', 173-195.

The Magi in Herodotus' *Histories*, however, are never introduced as partisans of Zoroaster, nor indeed is the prophet mentioned at all by Herodotus. A century after Herodotus, the Magi are found throughout Greek literature as Zoroastrian priests. The Magi in Herodotus are Zoroastrian priests as well, because they observe typically Zoroastrian practices, such as the exposure of dead bodies, the killing of *xrafstras* and the reverence for the dog. Herodotus never claims to have spoken with Magi. This is remarkable in view of his stress on discussions with the Egyptian priests whom he trusts more than all other informants.[26]

The main problem in dealing with the texts concerning the Magi is evidently the double meaning of the word as "Persian priest" and "magician." In many places it is unclear which of the two meanings is intended. Additional problems are posed by three important further questions. The first of these is that not only Persian Magi were recognised in Classical literature, but also Magi among the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Syrians, the Indians etc. The second problem is the opposite, that where the Magi are obviously intended, the reference is to the Brahmans or the Chaldaeans.[27] The third problem is the fact that there were non-Iranian individuals who referred to *themselves* as Magi.[28] The word Magus has in fact so many connotations, that it is problematic to insist upon the likelihood of attributing several of the functions performed by Magi in Classical texts to Zoroastrian priests. The present section will therefore be divided into several subsections, in which functions and characteristics of the Persian Magi will be discussed. Where possible, this will be connected with reconstructions of priestly functions in the relevant periods.

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[24] Cf. Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', 191-195.

[25] For particulars, cf. ch. 4.3.

[26] Cf. Lloyd, *Herodotus. Book II*, vol. 1, 89-100.

[27] E.g. *Scholia in Horatium Vetustiora*, Carm. II.2.17 Keller, where the Persian king is said to have been educated by the *Bragmanes*, or the texts referring to Zoroaster as a Chaldaean: *Mages* I, 36.

[28] Beautifully outlined in Nock, 'Paul and the Magus', *passim*.

a) *Priestly titles*

There probably were different types of priests in Achaemenian Iran and in later periods, but the diversity of priestly functions is difficult to reconstruct. The recognition of different priestly functionaries in the Elamite tablets, where some scholars distinguish between a Magus (OP *magu-*; El. *ma-ku-iš*), a fire-priest (OP **ātrvaxša-*; El. *d.ha-tur-ma-ak-šá* etc.), a high-priest (OP. **āθrava-pati-*; El. *ha-tur-ma-bat-ti-iš* etc.) and a specialist in hymns (OP **framazdā*; El. *pír-ra-ma-iz-da*)[29] is still disputed.[30] The Greek texts for the relevant periods do not seem to distinguish priestly titles or functionaries, but maintain the general appellation "Magus." The generic word for priest, ἱεϱεύς, is rarely applied to Persian functionaries. It does occur in Strabo's description of the large temple-estates in Anatolia, where the priests are likely to have fulfilled duties that made them seem similar to the other Anatolian priests.[31] Apart from the title "magus" there are some other references to Iranian priestly functionaries. Strabo refers to the fire-priests he witnessed in Cappadocia as πύϱαιθοι, "fire-kindlers," a word that cannot be connected with a known Iranian priestly title (cf. ch. 3.2). The word suitably refers to one of the priests' main functions: the tending of the fire.

The church historian Sozomenus (fifth century CE) is the only author to refer to a priestly hierarchy, distinguishing between the μάγοι, "priests, the ἀϱχιμάγοι,[32] "high-priests" and the μέγας ἀϱχιμάγος, "supreme high-priest."[33] This, it seems, refers to the MP distinctions between *moγ*, "priest", *mōwbed* (from OP **magu-pati-*),

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[29] For these functionaries, cf. Koch, *Religiösen Verhältnisse* 153-170; *ead.*, 'Religion und Kulten' in Kellens (ed.), *Religion iranienne*, 99-101.

[30] For criticisms, cf. *HZ* II 133-137.

[31] E.g. *Geography* 12.3.37, where Strabo describes the city of Zela, with a multitude of *hierodouloi* and priests, and one priest who exercises the secular and religious authority over the city.

[32] This title has also been preserved on an inscription, presumably from Hypaipa, mentioning Apollonius the Archimagus: G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata graeca ex lapidibus conlecta*, Strasburg 1878, no. 903a; cf. *HZ* III, 224; 251.

[33] Sozomenus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10.1; 2.12.4.

"high-priest" and *mōwbedān mōwbed*, "supreme high-priest."[34] Finally, in the Suda and similar later works we can find the claim that the Persians used to call the Magi Ὀστᾶναι.[35] This in all likelihood confuses the name of a famous Magus, Ostanes, with the title of a category of priests. That this is likely may be evident from the fact that the *Suda*, s.v. Μάγοι explicitly refers to the Ostanai and even to the Astrampsychoi as followers of Zoroaster, thus twice confusing a proper name (Ostanes, Astrampsychus) with a title. A similar state of affairs is found in Diogenes Laertius 1.2.

Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 4.16 is the only author who refers to a triple division of the Magi among the Persians: members of the highest class among them abstain from the eating of meat and from killing; the members of the second class do eat meat but refrain from killing domesticated animals; the members of the third class also do not kill all animals without distinction. The reason Porphyrius gives is that they all believe firmly in metempsychosis. Porphyrius gives as his source the mysterious author Eubulus, who is said to have written on the Mithraic mysteries, but his information is neither valid for Zoroastrianism, nor for Mithraism. The suggestion that Porphyrius (or Eubulus) here ascribes Pythagoraean characteristics to the Magi is the most likely interpretation of the passage. Vegetarianism is not wholly unknown among the Zoroastrians, but it is most unlikely that abstinence from meat would have been a duty of a class of the priesthood at any time in the history of the faith. Since this is precisely the subject of Porphyrius' treatise, and since he uses neo-Pythagoraean sources throughout his book, the ascription of Pythagoraean practices to the followers of one Pythagoras' primary masters, Zoroaster, is not entirely unexpected.[36]

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[34] For these titles, cf. Kreyenbroek, 'Zoroastrian Priesthood', 151-153 (with references). It is impossible to treat these correspondences as exact ones, because Sozomenus merely mentions the titles, and does not intend to provide a clear picture of the extremely complicated priestly categories. Cf. Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 50-51.

[35] *Suda*, s.v. Ὀστᾶναι; Arethas, *Scholia in Tatiani Orationem ad Graecos* 27: Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 269. It would be tempting to find in this reference a garbled form of Phl. *āsrōn*, "priest" (from Avestan *āθrauuan-*), but this requires a heavy emendation and is contradicted by some of the other passages mentioning the name Ostanes in the plural.

[36] For this interpretation, cf. Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus*, 27-33. (Pseudo-) Lucian, *Macrobii* 4, writes that the Magi reach the high age they do, because of their special diet.

b) *Priestly functions 1: interpretation of dreams*

In Herodotus, a group among the Magi is sometimes presented as interpreters of the royal dreams, especially those of the Median kings. Thus in *Histories* 1.107-108; 1.120; 1.128, he refers to the "dream-interpreters among the Magi." They interpret the dreams of Astyages, predicting the rise of Cyrus.[37] In 7.19, the Magi are also called upon to interpret the dreams that made Xerxes decide to carry on with the war against the Greeks. In 7.37, they interpret a solar eclipse. In both cases, the interpretations have dramatic consequences; the Magi at the Median court correctly interpret the dreams of Astyages but then retract and say that their predictions had already become reality: this eventually leads to Astyages' downfall through the hands of Cyrus, but not before the Magi had been impaled by an outraged king. In the case of Xerxes, the Magi consistently interpret the dream and the eclipse as positive indications of Xerxes' impending success against the Greeks, with the familiar disastrous results. It is difficult to avoid the idea that the Magi, or the dream-interpreters among them, are used by Herodotus as a literary device and that these texts do not refer to a "real" function of Persian priests.[38] The stories of the dreams of Astyages, however, were popular ones and may derive from Persian oral traditions; an echo of these traditions can also be found in Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.23.46, where the Magi—here introduced as a class of wise and learned men among the Persians—interpret a dream of Cyrus himself. Cicero claims the *Persica* of Dino as his source. Here, the interpretation of the dream is correct: Cyrus had seen the Sun standing at the end of his bed and tried to grasp it three times; the Magi interpreted this as an indication that Cyrus would rule for thirty years, which—says Cicero—indeed happened.[39]

If the stories on the dreams of Astyages and Cyrus reflect Persian oral traditions, the information on the priests as dream-interpreters may have a basis in reality. Dreams occupy an important place in Zoroastrian thinking, because it is in dreams that the divinities may appear to human beings. Zarathustra himself is credited with having had dreams which predicted certain dramatic aspects in his life (e.g. *WZ* 20.3-4) and a comparable late story was current about his mother (*ZN* 71-181). Sleep, however, was also a situation in which the threat of evil activity in human life was at its greatest. Just as there were good dreams, there were evil dreams and visions (Yt. 13.104). In the Gāthās, Zarathustra possibly also speaks of the two spirits as manifesting themselves in "the two kinds of dreams" (Y. 30.3).[40] There are indications, therefore, that there were evil as well as good dreams. These needed to be interpreted by religious specialists in order to establish the (divine or *daēvic*) provenance of the dream as well as its meaning. Just as in later Zoroastrianism all believers had to consult their priests on religious matters, it seems plausible to assume that the Magi performed the function of dream-interpreters. The Classical texts, in sum, may present us with literary conventions or techniques, but they can also have preserved an early testimony of one of the real functions of Persian priests.

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[37] For which, cf. Binder, *Die Aussetzung des Königskindes*, 17-28.

[38] For the importance of dreams in Herodotus' work, cf. P. Frisch, *Die Träume bei Herodot* (BKP 27), Meisenheim am Glan 1968.

[39] We do not know how long Cyrus really reigned; it is assumed that he defeated Astyages in 550 B.C.E. and that he died in 530 B.C.E. Cicero writes that he became king at the age of forty and died at the age of seventy.

c) *Priestly functions 2: divination*[41]

Throughout the Classical texts, the Magi are credited with extraordinary powers in the realm of divination.[42] It is here especially, that it is impossible to judge if these qualities reflect genuine activities of Persian priests, or if they are an echo of the qualities of the other Magi, the magicians. However this may be, the Persian Magi are regularly presented as specialists in certain divinatory techniques and also in the most powerful science of their time, astrology. A particular impetus for the latter aspect is the mention of Magi in Matthew 2.[43] There are innumerable references to the Magi following the star to Bethlehem, which are of no importance for our discussion.[44] But pagan authors also refer to the Magi as astrologers.[45] A certain interest in astrology must have existed among the Persian priests from a relatively early period. There are some astrological passages in the Avesta, and several in Pahlavi literature.[46] These do not show, however, to what extent Zoroastrian priests were engaged in astrology in the interest of predicting the individual future of a person. It seems likely, therefore, that the image of the Magi as astrologers (as it emerges particularly from Christian literature based on Mt 2) derives from popular imagination and from the conflation of the names of the Magi and the Chaldaeans.

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[40] Cf. Humbach, *Gāthās* II, 49. This is a much disputed passage. For an entirely different interpretation, cf. Gershevitch, 'Approaches to Zoroaster's Gathas', 15-19.

[41] For an introduction to Zoroastrian divination, cf. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'La divination dans l'Iran ancien', in: A. Caquot & M. Leibovic (eds.), *La divination*, Paris 1968, vol. 1, 141-155.

[42] They are frequently referred to as specialists in the realm of divination: cf. for instance Diogenes Laertius 1.7; Pseudo-Lucian, *Macrobii* 4.

[43] For which, cf. G. Mussies, 'Some Astrological Presuppositions of Matthew 2. Oriental, Classical and Rabbinical Parallels', in: P.W. van der Horst (ed.), *Aspects of Religious Contact and Conflict in the Ancient World* (Utrechtse Theologische Reeks 31), Utrecht 1995, 25-44 (with references).

[44] As an example of the type of literature, one can consult the treatise *On the*

Other divinatory practices are also attributed to the Magi: they predict the future by staring into the fire, and they divine with sticks or rods. The first technique, staring into the fire to learn about future events, is found in Agathias, *Historiae* 2.25 and obviously combines a ritual function of the priests—tending the fire—with an interpretation based upon their reputation. Something similar also underlies the divination with sticks or rods, found in the *Scholia in Nicandri Theriaca* 613 (with a reference to Dino): "The Magi [...] and the Scythians divine with the tamarisk. And Dino says in the first book of his third collection, that the Median diviners also divine with rods. [...] And Metrodorus says in his book *On Custom* that the tamarisk is the oldest plant and that the Egyptians wear a wreath of tamarisk in the procession for Zeus, and the Magi among the Medes." This typical amalgam of information (partly from Herodotus), shows a confusion (perhaps already in Dino's lost work) between the *barsom*, the ritual sticks (often procured from the tamarisk) and the use of sticks for divination. Wands carried by the Magi occur regularly in Christian literature, but there they almost always refer to the Biblical story of the rods of Aaron and the Egyptian sorcerers (Ex

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things that happened in Persia through the incarnation of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ by Pseudo-Julius Africanus (*PG* 10.97-108). There is an enormous literature on the journey of the Magi, both by Iranianists and by classicists, church historians and art historians; for the possible connections between the story of Mt 2 and Iranian traditions, and Oriental elaborations on Mt 2, cf. *HZ* III, 446-457 (with references).

[45] Although this appears to have been mainly restricted to the constructed image of Zoroaster as the inventor of astrology, with the Magi as astrologers in his wake (thus Justinus, *Epitome* 1.1.7-10 etc.).

[46] A. Panaino, *Tištrya* II; *id.*, 'Uranographia Iranica I', in: Gyselen (ed.), *Au carrefour des religions*, 205-225; W.B. Henning, 'An Astronomical Chapter of the Bundahišn', *JRAS* 1942, 229-248 (= *Selected Papers* II, 95-114).

7:8-12).[47] Athenaeus' remark that the Magi touch the god with sticks (*Deipnosophists* 12.40.530 (from the poet Phoenix)) also probably reflects the use of the *barsom*.

An entirely different category of information concerns the special capacity of Persian Magi to travel to the underworld. In various publications, P. Kingsley has drawn attention to the famous underworld-travel in Lucian, *Menippus* 6-8, suggesting that in spite of the satire evident from the entire text, Lucian's description of "one of the Magi, the disciples and successors of Zoroaster" by the name of Mithrobarzanes reflects genuine activities of Zoroastrian Magi.[48] There were Zoroastrian priests who claimed to be able to travel to heaven and hell. We have solid evidence for this in Kirdēr's vision;[49] the journey to heaven and hell is also well known as a literary *topos* in Iranian literature.[50] In the texts that have been preserved, the purpose of the journey to heaven and hell is always the foundation or the reintroduction of orthodoxy. But since the idea of travelling to heaven and hell clearly existed, and certain priests were considered to have special gifts in the realm of vision and inner knowledge,[51] the suggestion that Lucian's description of the activities of Mithrobarzanes was not entirely his own fantasy remains an attractive possibility. It is unclear what Strabo means when he writes (*Geography* 15.3.20) that among the Persians the Magi also act as necromancers, dish-diviners and water-diviners.

d) *Priestly functions 3: ritual and theology*

By far the most common use of the term Magus for Persian priests refers to them as specialists in the worship of the gods.

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[47] Thus, for instance, Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 1.24; Macarius, *Sermo* 2.7 (p. 23.25-26 Berthold). A comparable literary *topos* has grown out of the mention of Magi at the Babylonian court in the LXX version of Daniel (e.g. Dan 2.2; 2.10).

[48] Kingsley, 'Greek Origin', 253-257; 'Greeks, Shamans and Magi', 193 with n. 25; *Ancient Philosophy*, 226-227.

[49] For the text, cf. Ph. Gignoux, *Les quatre inscriptions du mage Kirdīr*; id., *Les inscriptions de Kirdīr et sa vision de l'au-delà* (Conferenze IsMEO 2), Roma 1990. For a commentary, cf. P.O. Skjaervø, '"Kirdir's Vision." Translation and Analysis', *AMI* 16 (1983), 269-306. For the background of the genre of visionary journeys, cf. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 27-51.

[50] The best-known example is the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*, but there are comparable stories in the legendary biographies of Zarathustra and Vištāspa.

[51] As reflected, for instance, in Diogenes Laertius 1.7 with several Iranian parallels; cf. ch. 3.4.3.

The interpretation of μαγεία as "the worship of the gods" (θεῶν θεραπεία) is found for the first time in Pseudo-Plato, *Alcibiades* 1.122A, where the "magian doctrine" of Zoroaster is explained in simple words as "the worship of the gods." This expression can be found repeated almost *verbatim* in several passages, particularly from philosophical works, where the need was evident to distinguish this interpretation of the word from the meaning "magic." Thus, Diogenes Laertius 1.6 writes that the Magi "hold discourse on the worship of the gods," Dio Chrysostomus, *Oration* 36.41, explains to his audience that those who are called Magi by the Persians specialise in the worship of the divine (also *Oration* 49.7) and Porphyrius, *De Abstinentia* 4.16, writes that among the Persians those who are wise with regard to the divine, and who worship the divine, are called Magi; that Magus is in fact the local designation for this class of people. In Latin authors, the same designations occur. Both Apuleius, *Apologia* 25-26 and Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.6.32, refer explicitly to Plato to explain their interpretation of the *magus* as someone trained in sacred knowledge and ritual.

The above interpretation is evidently, sometimes even explicitly, directed against an easy equation between γοητεία and μαγεία. Aristotle is quoted by Diogenes Laertius (1.8) as an authority who had written that the Persian Magi did not know the magic referred to as γοητεία. Dio Chrysostomus, *Oration* 36.41, writes that the Greeks call magicians (γόητας) Magi out of ignorance.

Magi functioning as ritual and theological specialists can be found frequently in Classical texts. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.132, is well known for writing that the presence of a Magus was required at every performance of a sacrifice. He was present, it seems, as an overseer of the ritual, and as the person capable of reciting an invocation (ἐπαοιδή), which was explained to Herodotus as a theogony. Most scholars interpret this theogony as a Yašt, a hymn in honour of an individual divinity. Elsewhere in the *Histories*, the Magi also act as ritual specialists, performing rituals along the routes of the military campaigns (7.43; 113; 191). In Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, this aspect is developed into a more particular direction: the Magi here act as ritual specialists who advise the king and military leaders in religious matters, telling them when, how, where and to whom they should sacrifice. In *Cyropaedia* 4.5.14, the Magi are summoned at dawn to select the gifts for the gods in acknowledgment for success and in 7.5.57 the king sacrifices to whichever god the Magi specify. In 8.3.11, the formation of a procession of sacred chariots is directed by the Magi, because "the Persians think that they ought much more scrupulously to be guided by those whose profession is with things divine than they are by those in other professions" (trl. W. Miller, LCL). Xenophon also specifies (8.1.23) that Cyrus, in his wish to become a model for his subjects, installed the [... of the] Magi. At this point, there is unfortunately a lacuna in the text, so that we do not know in what function the Magi were installed.

In Strabo's descriptions of the Persian and Cappadocian rituals (*Geography* 15.3.13-15), the Magi are wholly in control of the rituals. It is a Magus who cuts the meat of the animal; the Magi also tend the fire, perform the libations, hold the *baresman* and recite long invocations. They cover their mouths with the *paitidāna* and, holding the *baresman*, they recite texts for approximately one hour. The recitation of texts is likewise recorded by Curtius Rufus (3.3.9; 5.1.22). Pausanias also mentions the tending of the fire and the recitation of texts as the main discipline of the Lydian Magi (5.27.5-6).

In his defence of magic as a divine art, Apuleius (*Apology* 25-26) states firmly that Magus is simply the Persian appellative for his native *sacerdos*, "priest." Thus, a magus is a specialist in rituals and theology, his is a divine art, dedicated to the worship of the gods. Diogenes Laertius 1.6 also ascribes the specific realms of sacrifices and prayers to the Magi, adding the observation that they pretend that the gods only listen to them.

Elaborate descriptions of the Magi and their functions can be found in the church histories of Socrates and Sozomenus (and the summaries of these in Cassiodorus). Here we encounter the Magi at the court of the Sasanian kings; they are firmly in control of court affairs. They direct the royal worship and stir up the king's anger against the Christians.

The Magi are not only presented as ritual priests and specialists in worship, but also as theologians. Several passages concerning Zoroastrian doctrine attribute the Persian religious doctrines to the Magi (or to Zoroaster and the Magi). Likewise, the Magi are frequently presented as the specialists in religious education. Characteristic elements of Zoroastrianism, such as the dualism between a good and an evil principle, are most often paraphrased as the philosophy of the Magi. Possibly the earliest example of this is Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 14.4.1090B, where the Magi (among others) are presented as representatives of those who hold that "good" is the source of all. Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.41.90, presents the Magi as a theological guild, who organise meetings in a temple and discuss significant events among themselves. The Magi as educators are a *topos* in certain authors (cf. ch. 4.8.4); they are not only responsible for the education of Persians themselves, but also occasionally act as teachers of foreigners longing for wisdom. Philostratus writes on this subject that the Magi only educate foreigners if the king expressly orders them to do so (*Vitae Sophistarum* 494). We know of one occasion where this is said to have actually happened: Xerxes ordered the Magi to instruct the refugee Themistocles in the Persian religion (Plutarch, *Life of Themistocles* 29.4-5). But there are countless other Greeks, especially philosophers, who are said to have been educated (partly) by the Magi. The most famous among these are Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Plato.[52]

With such an illustrious pedigree, it can be no great surprise that the Magi were thought to have remarkable insights in the realm of philosophy (thus, e.g., Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.100; *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 74 etc.). It was against such a tradition, it seems, that Diogenes Laertius reacted in the proem to his history of philosophical schools (for which, cf. ch. 3.4.1). In this attack on the primacy of Oriental philosophy, however, he has preserved references to a large number of works from the Academy and the Peripatos devoted specifically to the teachings of the Magi. These works appear to have paid particular attention to dualism. It is likely, but impossible to prove, that Plutarch used some of these writings in his description and interpretation of Zoroastrian theology (cf. ch. 3.3.1).

e) Characteristics and dress

In the many texts discussing and describing the Magi, we can discern several trends in characterisation. The Magi are, first and foremost, presented as sages. They are the privileged guardians of Oriental wisdom. This wisdom has its origin in the teaching of Zoroaster, who is described as a Magus himself (Plutarch, *De Iside* 46; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.42; 10.9.10) or as the founder of the order of the Magi. The transmission of their traditions was the specific task of these priests, who constituted an hereditary priesthood. This, it seems, is what is implied by those authors who stress the fact that the Magi have their own successions (διαδοχή; Diogenes Laertius 1.2; Lucian, *Menippus* 6; Sozomenus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.9.1).

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[52] For Pythagoras as student of the Magi, cf. the texts given in Kingsley, 'Greek Origin', *passim*; for Empedocles, cf. *id.*, *Ancient Philosophy*, 226-227; for Democritus, cf. *Mages* I, 210-211; for Plato, cf. *Mages* II, 40-41.

Two passages mention the fact that the Magi wear white clothes. Diogenes Laertius mentions this in passing (1.7). Plutarch gives a more elaborate description (*Roman Questions* 26.270D-E): "Why do women in mourning wear white robes and white head-dresses? Do they do this, as men say the Magi do, arraying themselves against Hades and the powers of darkness, and making themselves like unto Light and Brightness?" (trl. F.C. Babbitt, LCL)

That the Magi in antiquity wore white clothes is very likely, but Plutarch is our oldest source to this effect.[53] There are various speculations concerning colour symbolisms and the three estates of ancient Iranian societies (priests – warriors – husbandmen).[54] The attribution of the white colour to the priests is common; it is most often based on Pahlavi texts describing the garment of Vohu Manah and Ahura Mazdā. These garments are without exception white and luminous. They are the heavenly representatives of the clothes worn by men in general and priests in particular.[55] Plutarch's interpretation of the white clothes of the Magi strikes a very familiar note. All modern Zoroastrian priests wear white, and there is no reference to any innovation in this matter.

The other parts of their costume are known from scattered details: the lay sacrificer described in Herodotus is said to wear a *tiara* with a wreath (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.132). Pausanias (5.27.6) writes that the priests also wear the *tiara*. In Strabo's description of the *tiara*, he mentions the fact that the cheekpieces are folded before the mouth; this corresponds to the Western Iranian variety of the *paitidāna* (*Geography* 5.13.15). Strabo also writes that the Magi hold a bundle of slender sticks when they perform their rituals: the *barsom* (*ibid.*).

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[53] Cf. *HZ* II, 21; 107; 147.

[54] For a recent example, cf. G. Dumézil, 'Le costume de guerre du dernier Darius', in: Gnoli & Lanciotti (eds.), *Orientalia Tucci*, 261-265.

[55] G. Widengren, *The Great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God. Studies in Iranian and Manichaean Religion* (Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 1945:5), Uppsala 1945, 49-53.

2. *Magusaeans*

In early Christian sources, mention is sometimes made of a separate group of seemingly orthodox Zoroastrians known by the name of *Magusaeans* (Μαγουσαῖοι). The origin of the word is the Aramaic plural of *magūšā*, "magus", "Persian priest".[56] It seems likely that the word originated in the translations of Bardaiṣan's *Book of the Laws of Countries*, for it is in texts deriving from these translations that the word can be found with some regularity.[57] The word only occurs in Christian (Greek and Latin) and Manichaean (Coptic) texts and is often consistently used in a specific sense.[58]

In their monumental *Mages hellénisés*, Bidez and Cumont accorded a special position to the Magusaeans: they were the priests of the Mazdaean colonies of the Western world, who were also responsible for all pseudo-Zoroastrian literature. They were not orthodox Zoroastrians, but priests of "Mazdaean" communities, who only partially accepted Zoroastrian doctrine, mainly remaining loyal to pre-Zoroastrian "naturalist" ideas. They used Aramaic as their language and did not posses any sacred books in Avestan or Pahlavi (*sic*). They were influenced by Babylonian astronomy and astrology, and particularly by Stoic philosophy.[59]

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[56] For the etymology of the name, cf. Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* I, 35, n. 3 and Boyce & Grenet, *HZ* III, 256 with note 4. A slightly different suggestion is made by J. Lieu & S.N.C. Lieu, 'Mani and the Magians (?)—CMC 137-140', in: A. van Tongerloo & S. Giversen (eds.), *Manichaica Selecta. Studies presented to Professor Julien Ries on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Manichaean Studies I), Lovanii 1991, 203-223, p. 213.

[57] Lieu & Lieu, *ibid*. For these texts, cf. the synoptic tables in B. Rehm, *Die Pseudoklementinen II. Rekognitionen in Rufins Übersetzung* (GCS 51), Berlin 1965, 276-277.

[58] I hesitate to include the peculiar word Μαγουδαῖος in this discussion. It occurs once, in Johannes Damascenus, *Epistula ad Theophilum Imperatorem de sacris imaginibus* 11 (*PG* 95.360A). It is commonly thought to be a wilful conflation of μάγος and 'Ιουδαῖος (thus Lampe, *PGL*, s.v.), but it may be preferable to regard it as a mistake for Μαγουσαῖος, since it is wilfully parallelled to the Magi of Mt. 2, but adding a pejorative meaning.

[59] 'Les Mages que les Grecs ont le mieux connus, n'étaient pas des zoroastriens orthodoxes. Ceux avec qui ils ont eu les relations les plus directes et les plus constantes, sont ces "Maguséens", prêtres des colonies mazdéennes ... ils restèrent ainsi plus fidèles que leurs congénères de la Perse aux vieilles croyances naturistes des tribus iraniennes. Leur éloignement de la pure théologie zoroastrienne fut favorisé par le fait qu'ayant adopté une langue sémitique, l'araméen, ils devinrent incapables de lire les textes avestiques, et selon toute probabilité ils ne possédèrent aucun livre sacré écrit en zend ou pehlvi. [...]

That the putative community of Magusaeans would have been responsible for the corpus of pseudo-Zoroastrian literature, is no longer tenable.[60] Nor, it seems, do any of the other qualifications Bidez and Cumont gave to the Magusaeans bear closer scrutiny. On the contrary, it will be argued here that wherever the word is used in a distinctive manner, it refers to a community of orthodox Zoroastrian settlers, who would have nothing to do with foreign learning and were—on the authority of at least one author—quite uninterested in sharing their religion with foreigners.

Some scholars have put forward other interpretations: according to Widengren, Magusaean is simply a synonym for Magus, a Persian priest,[61] and according to Boyce and Grenet Magusaean is a synonym for magus and—hence—for Zoroastrian.[62]

There certainly are some texts where Magusaean is simply another word for Magus,[63] but there are other passages where the word is used distinctively to single out a community among the Persians.[64] It is with these that the remainder of this section will be concerned.

As was mentioned above, the earliest testimonies to the Magusaeans can be found in the texts related to the *Book of the Laws of*

Dans ce grand centre scientifique qu'était alors Babylone, ils apprirent en particulier l'astronomie et ils adoptèrent sa sœur bâtarde l'astrologie. Puis après Alexandre [...] ils subirent en particulier l'influence du stoïcisme que des affinités profondes rapprochaient des religions de l'Orient.' *Mages* I, VI-VIII.

[60] Beck, 'Thus spake not Zarathuštra', 492-493.

[61] Widengren, *Religionen*, 176-7.

[62] *HZ* III, 256. Boyce and Grenet consistently interpret references to Persians, Magi and Magusaeans as referring to Zoroastrians. Although I often do not share the outcome of their views in this respect, the subsequent developments in Byzantine literature, where for instance the word *Persian* simply means "Muslim" without any ethnic significance (as, for instance, in the eulogy on the neomartyr Nikètas by Theodorus Mouzalon, edited by F. Halkin, *Hagiographica inedita decem* (CCSG 21), Turnhout-Leuven 1989, 127-54), at least shows that such an interpretation is possible.

[63] Basilius Seleuciensis, *Oratio* 38 (*PG* 85, 420), where in a historical context Smerdis is called Μαγουσέος; Leontius Byzantinus, *Contra Eutychianos et Nestorianos* (*PG* 86, 1376C), in reference to Theodore of Mopsuestia's περὶ τῆς ἐν Περσίδι μαγικῆς; the *Suda*, s.v. μαγωγ and s.v. Πέρσαι, where μαγωγ (for μάγος?) and μαγουσαῖος are interpreted as synonyms; Michael Glycas, *Annales* II (*PG* 158, 253), where (clearly on the basis of the *Suda*) Magusaean is synonymous with Persian; *Vita Sancti Epiphanii* (*PG* 41, 41C) where in the course of one story, Μαγουσαῖος and Μάγος are used indiscriminately.

[64] The Coptic Manichaean texts use the word *magousaios* for all Zoroastrians or their priests, and reserve the word *magos* for the Magi of Mt 2. Cf. Lieu & Lieu, 'Mani and the Magians (?)', 210-213.

Countries of the Syrian author Bardaiṣan (Bardesanes) of Edessa.[65] The presence of Zoroastrianism in Syria has been suspected from Classical literature (according to Berossos, quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 5.65.3, Artaxerxes II had a statue of Anāhitā erected in Damascus; cf. ch. 4.1.3), and appears to be supported, on a modest level, by archaeological and epigraphical finds.[66] Bardaiṣan's native city, Edessa, had been part of the Achaemenian Empire, and was to be one of the battlegrounds where Romans and Sasanians met. As an important centre of cultural and religious life, knowledge of Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrians must have been easily obtainable there.[67] Bardaiṣan, moreover, is said to have been a great traveller, who visited Armenia in a period long before the total Christianisation of that country.[68] He can therefore be expected to have had first hand knowledge of Zoroastrianism.

The exact relation between Bardaiṣan's passage on the Magusaeans (*Book of the Laws of Countries* 29) and the passages generally thought to be translations of that work (the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* 9.20.4-21.2; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 6.10.16-17 (and cf. 6.10.38); pseudo-Caesarius, *Erotapocriseis* 108.43-49) is very complicated.[69]

Eusebius renders Bardaiṣan's information thus: "It was a custom among the Persians to marry their daughters, sisters and mothers; and the Persians did not only practise these unholy marriages in their own land and their own climate, but also those of them who settled outside Persia—they are called Magusaeans—continue to practise this crime, for they hand down their laws and customs to their children in succession. And up to now there are many of them in Media, and in Egypt, Phrygia and Galatia." The geographical information in this text—which is partly concerned with the relation between geographical location, astrological influences on these locations and national cultures—implies that the Magusaeans have flocked North (Media), South (Egypt) and West (Anatolia).[70] It is therefore questionable, whether changes in this geographical information are as significant as is sometimes suggested.

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[65] For whom, cf. H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa*, Assen 1966.

[66] Cf. for instance the name Ορθονοβαζος, a compound of some form of the name of Verethraghna, the god of Victory, and the word *vazdah-*, permanence, found in Doura-Europos (F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos (1921-1923)*, Paris 1926, 404-5). Archaeological finds are few, but there are at least some *tesserae* depicting Anāhitā: H. Ingholt, H. Seyrig & A. Caquot, *Receuil des tessères de Palmyre*, Paris 1955, nrs. 166 and 167.

[67] Cf. J.B. Segal, *Edessa: 'The Blessed City'*, Oxford 1970, 116.

[68] Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan*, 217-218.

[69] For a summary of views, cf. Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan*, 60-76, who convincingly defends Bardaiṣan's original authorship.

Such changes are known from the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* 9.20.4-21.2: "And again it is customary among Persians to take mothers and sisters and daughters in wedlock, and all Persians under the open heaven marry in this incestuous way. [...] From among this same Persian nation some have wandered away—they are called Magusaeans; some of them are in Media and Parthia up to now, but also a few in Egypt and many in Phrygia and Galatia. They all serve this tradition of incest in an unaltered form, and hand it down to their children (...)." It may be that the author of the *Recognitiones* changed the geographical information because he knew that there were hardly any Zoroastrians left in Egypt, but that they could be found in some numbers in Anatolia, but this is uncertain. It is all the more uncertain because pseudo-Caesarius' account, which is probably dependent upon the *Recognitiones*, again gives a totally different geographical account: he not only mentions Chaldaeans and Babylonians instead of Magusaeans (thus reflecting the common confusion of his age), but places them among the Medes, Parthians, Elamites, Egyptians, Phrygians and Galatians; this geographical distribution cannot be entirely unconnected with *Acts* 2.9-10.

A similar adaptation of the information obtained from Bardaiṣan appears to be present in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* 6.10.38, where he writes the following: "And that the Magusaeans not only sleep with their daughters in Persia, but in every land (ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει), wherever they may live, they maintain the customs of their forebears, and the initiations of their mysteries." The Persians do not have mysteries as such, and Eusebius obviously embellished Bardaiṣan's information by adding an interpretation of Persian marital customs based on his perception of pagan religiosity. It seems safest, therefore, to restrict the use that can be made of the texts somehow connected with Bardaiṣan's description of the Laws of the Persians (*Book of the Laws of Countries* 29) to those passages faithfully reflecting the Syriac version.

From these passages, it emerges that the word Magusaean came to be used to denote the Iranian settlers outside Iran, who were conspicuous for two reasons: they practised incestuous marriages and they handed down their religion in succession from parents to children. This is generally taken to refer to an oral transmission of the faith, and to a primacy of the family in religious education, such as it had also been current among the Greeks, for instance.[71]

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[70] *HZ* III, 256.

That this is a likely interpretation is clear from the most extensive passage on the Magusaeans, the 258th letter of Basil the Great (fourth century CE), addressed to Epiphanius: "So for the nation of the Magusaeans, to which you saw fit to call our attention in another letter, it is numerous among us, scattered across almost the whole country, colonists who have come to our country long ago from Babylon. They have used their own peculiar customs, not mingling with other peoples. It is completely impossible to use reason with them, inasmuch as they have been taken by the devil, according to his will. For there are no books among them, nor teachers of religion, but they are educated in an unreasoning way, receiving their impiety by transmission from father to son. Now apart from these things—these are observed by all—they reject animal sacrifice (ζωοθυσία) as a defilement, (even) slaughtering through the hands of others the animals they need; they rave after unlawful marriages, and they consider fire to be a god, etc. But sofar no one of the Magi has told us any myths about their descent from Abraham; but they claim some Zarnouan as the ancestor of their race. Accordingly, I can write nothing more to your Honour about them."

This passage has drawn much attention from students of Zoroastrianism and of the history of Asia Minor, because it is datable and offers a precious insight into the working of an expatriate Zoroastrian community in a Christianising world.[72] The community of the Magusaeans was still numerous in Basil's days. This finds some confirmation from the inscriptions of Kirdēr, who writes that he encountered "orthodox" communities of Zoroastrians in Cappadocia, as well as "heterodox" ones.[73] Basil furthermore makes the connection between these communities and Babylonia, which reflects the information found in Bardesanes.

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[71] Cf. J.N. Bremmer, 'The Family and Other Centres of Religious Learning in Antiquity', in: J.W. Drijvers & A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 61), Leiden 1995, 29-38.

[72] *HZ* III, 276-278; for the historical background in an Iranian perspective: M.-L. Chaumont, 'Conquêtes Sassanides et propaganda Mazdéenne', *Historia* 22 (1973), 664-710, pp. 664-684; for the historical background to Basil's letters, cf. Mitchell, *Anatolia* II, 67-73 (Cappadocia), with literature esp. on p. 68, n. 91. Cf. also Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, vol. 2, 122-126.

The communities of the Magusaeans do not mingle with other people. This is the only passage in Classical literature where this element—commonly encountered in the Pahlavi texts themselves—is mentioned. The evidence for this behaviour from the Iranian texts is mainly found in discussions of proper conduct in the Pahlavi books that appear to reflect the situation of the Zoroastrians after the coming of Islam. In theory, Zoroastrians are forbidden to have physical, personal or even commercial contacts with followers of other faiths (*jud-dēn*; *agdēn*; *jud-kēš* etc.).[74] In earlier Zoroastrian literature, the existence of other faiths—apart from the *daēva*-worshippers—is scarcely mentioned. Much evidence comes from the Christian martyrologies (for instance the fact that apostasy from Zoroastrianism was a capital punishment), and from the instructions in later Pahlavi texts. Basil's observation that the Magusaeans do not mingle with other nations seems therefore in accordance with the prescriptions of a highly puritanical variety of Zoroastrianism: groups of Zoroastrians who held strictly to the rules of purity, for instance, would be barred from any contact whatsoever with non-believers, since these are by definition impure.

His observation that there are no books among them, nor teachers of religion, is equally interesting. It points not only to the fact that Zoroastrianism had remained a purely oral tradition in a relatively advanced stage of its development, but also stresses the fact that the primary responsibility for religious education is placed in the sphere of the family. This can only partially be confirmed from the Iranian sources. Memorising the sacred texts, prayers, and all that is needed for the daily religious life is one of the obligations of all believers. This is clear, for instance, from Yt. 8.59-60 (= Yt. 14.51-52) where the "listless man who does not chant the Gathas, who destroys existence, who withstands that religions that is Ahuric, Zoroastrian" is excluded from participation in the rituals for Tištrya (or Verethraghna).[75] Several chapters of the *Hērbedestān* (*H.* 13; 16-17) are devoted to the duty of memorising the sacred texts. Taking religious instruction is in many passages recommended to the believers.[76] Parents must provide a proper education for their children (*SDN* 51). The Zoroastrian texts order children to be obedient towards their parents and their priests (*SDN* 40). There appear to have existed two different options: an institutionalised system of education, provided in religious schools and taught by priests, and a family education, where children are taught the basics of their religion at home.[77] It seems that Basil refers to the latter system.

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[73] KKZ 12; KNRm 39; KSM 18.

[74] Cf., for instance, *PhlRAdFb* 82; 91; 103; *PhlRDd* 7; 30; *H.* 11 etc.

[75] For a commentary, cf. the literature given in De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 27 with nn. 47-49.

The Magusaeans are distinguished from others by their strong opposition to animal sacrifice. They regard the killing of animals as a pollution (μίασμα). Nevertheless, the Magusaeans are not vegetarians (as could not be expected from Zoroastrians), but "they slaughter through the hands of others the animals they need." This appears to refer to their buying meat from followers of different religions. Buying meat from unbelievers is expressly condemned in *PhlRDd.* 14.7. There are many prescriptions for the taking of animal life, and the unlawful taking of animal life is a grave sin (*PhlRDd* 17). In theory, animal sacrifice was the only legal way to take animal life.[78] Animal sacrifice, as we have seen from Strabo's accounts, was carried out by the priests and followed by the ritual sharing of the meat among those who participated in the ritual. These rules have been observed down to the present day and this may also explain Basil's reference to "the hands of others" who kill the animals.

Basil's remarks on the marital customs of the Magusaeans are equally vague. The Magusaeans have a predilection for "unlawful" marriages. The "law" in question being the Christian marital prescriptions (monogamous, non-consanguineous), this could refer to the practice of polygamy, to consanguineous marriages or to both. Basil, as so many of his contemporaries, had difficulties with marriage to begin with,[79] which again broadens the possible meaning of "unlawful marriages". The phrase therefore does not yield significant new information on the Magusaeans. In the light of the information obtained from Bardesanes and his Greek translators, it may refer to the consanguineous marriages of the Magusaeans, but one wonders why Basil—if he knew about them—did not write more explicitly on the subject. That the Magusaeans consider fire to be a god is of course most plausible.

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[76] Cf., for instance, *Dk.* 6.69; 98; 310; 316. For more references, cf. Kotwal & Kreyenbroek, *Hērbedestān*, 16-18.

[77] Cf. the evidence from the *CAP* in ch. 2.6.

[78] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 162-163; 244.

[79] P. Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York 1988 (London 1989^2), 274-278.

The final sentence of Basil's letter has been frequently discussed, because it appears to refer to Zurvan. Basil's letter is addressed to Epiphanius of Salamis, a bishop known for his antiquarian interests. Apparently Epiphanius had inquired of Basil whether the Magusaeans of his territories claimed Abraham as their ancestor. This tradition must have had a certain currency, based presumably on the identification of the Magi with the Chaldaeans and the ancestry of Abraham from Ur.[80] It is unlikely that this theory would have been current among the Zoroastrians themselves, but it appears to have been so in certain Jewish circles.[81] Basil did not find evidence for this alleged descent among the Magi (i.e. possibly the priests of the Magusaeans) of Cappadocia. On the contrary, the Magi claim that their "ancestor" is Ζαϱνουαν or possibly Ζαϱνουας.

It is generally thought that this name is a corrupt form of Zurvān (with an intrusive -n-). This interpretation is at present the only likely option, though not entirely unproblematic. Among most Zoroastrians, Zurvan would not be easily considered an ancestor, since gods and mortals are strictly separated. Zaehner adduced a parallel from Moses Khorenats'i's *History of the Armenians* (1.6 and) 1.9, where Zruvan, Titan and Yapetost'ē are said to be the ancestors of the three races of the earth.[82] He interpreted this text as a conflation of Greek, Jewish and Iranian myths of origin, and used this as evidence for the existence of an Iranian myth claiming Zurvan to be the ancestor of the Iranians. The passage is in fact, however, based on *Oracula Sibyllina* 3.110-155 (Kronos, Titan and Japheth as the three primal rulers), and the occurrence of Zurvan is due only to the fact that his name was the standard Armenian translation of Kronos. If Basil has indeed inquired among the Cappadocian Zoroastrians who the ancestor of their race was, they may have answered such a question by referring to the ultimate source of everything, Zurvan. Their recognition of Zurvan, however, does not seem to have influenced the puritanical version of their religion.

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[80] This is to be deduced from the addition to Diogenes Laertius 1.9, where the theory that the Jews are descendants of the Magi is so explained. Cf. A. Biedl, *Das grosse Exzerpt Φ. Zur Textgeschichte des Laertios Diogenes* (Studi e Testi 184), Città del Vaticano 1955, 112, and the discussion of this passage in ch. 3.4.3.

[81] Cf. *HZ* III, 277-278; *Mages* I, 41, n. 5.

[82] *Zurvan*, 144B.

This impression is enhanced by the information given by Epiphanius, who prompted Basil to write this description of the Magusaeans. Epiphanius mentions the Magusaeans twice, in his *De Fide* 12 and 13.[83] In 12.5, he simply mentions them in a list of pagan religious specialists: "And again of many other mysteries and heresiarchs and rupture-makers, whose leaders are called Magusaeans among the Persians, *prophētai* among the Egyptians, the leaders of the *adyta* and the sanctuaries, and those of the Babylonian Magi who are called *Gazarēnoi*, sages and diviners, and those called *Euileoi* and Brahmans among the Indians, and hierophants and *neōkoroi* among the Greeks, the multitude of the Cynics and the leaders of the other unspeakable philosophers."

This passage is very unclear in its details, and in the choice of heresiarchs and rupture-makers. The mention of the Magi as Babylonians is not significant for the interpretation of this passage, for the entire passage on the Babylonians is evidently inspired by Daniel 2:27LXX, where the rare word Γαζαρηνοί (from Aram *gazerīn*, "diviners/astrologers") occurs together with the Magi, sages and diviners. The reference to the Indian *Euileoi* cannot be traced. All one can make of this passage is that Epiphanius here interprets the Magusaeans as the religious specialists of the Persians, as priests.

This may be different in the passage immediately following, *De Fide* 13.1, where Epiphanius mentions the following: "Now, as I said before, among the Persians those are called Magusaeans who abhor statues, but worship statues (nonetheless, to wit) fire, the moon and the sun." Here, it seems, Epiphanius makes a distinction between "the Persians," presumably the Zoroastrians, and the Magusaeans, the latter being distinguished by the fact that they reject statue cult.

It has been suggested that the introduction of the cult of statues among the Zoroastrians in the late Achaemenian period, was not a development followed by all Zoroastrians, but that it provoked bitter feelings among part of the priesthood. These feelings of resentment can then be invoked to explain the development of a temple cult of fire.[84] The Classical texts regularly mention the fact that the Persians do not worship statues of their divinities. It is difficult to evaluate these materials, because the aniconic worship of divinities among the Persians appears to be one of the literary *topoi* among many Greek authors. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that Epiphanius as well as Basil describe the Magusaeans as the upholders of a puritanical variety of Zoroastrianism. We are, then, quite remote from the Hellenised Magi that were once thought to have inhabited the ancient world.

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[83] Epiphanius' *De Fide* is sort of an appendix to his *Panarion*; the Magusaeans can also be found in a list of languages and peoples in Epiphanius' *Ancoratus* (PG 43.221-222), as descendants of Shem.

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[84] Cf., for instance, M. Boyce, 'On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire', *JAOS* 95 (1975), 454-465; Y. Yamamoto, 'The Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire in Archaeology and Literature', *Orient* 15 (1979), 19-53 (part I); *Orient* 17 (1981), 67-104 (part II).

8. *Social and ethical codes*

1. *Purity Rules and Rules of Conduct*

The Persians differed from Greeks and Romans not only in the things they believed and in the manner in which they worshipped their divinities, but also through a complex devotional life governing personal and social behaviour. Among the most eye-catching aspects of Zoroastrianism as a living faith in the ancient world, were the different Persian attitudes towards marriage—Iranians were polygamous and encouraged marriage with close kin—and the different manner of disposing of corpses—the rites of exposure. These two subjects will be treated in separate sections. In addition to these aspects of Zoroastrian life, there were several other customs among the Iranians that were wholly different from what Greeks or Romans—however much they may differ between them—thought normal behaviour. Most of these Iranian customs are somehow connected with the purity of the elements earth, water, and fire.[1]

Zoroastrianism requires from its believers that they respect and defend the purity of the seven elements of creation: earth-water-fire-cattle-plants-heaven-man.[2] These seven elements are represented and guarded by the seven Amesha Spentas; offending against the rules of purity implies offending against the deities who guard the elements. This is thought to be harmful to the good creation, and, as a consequence, to the fate of the believer's soul at the judgment after death. Every individual is therefore under the obligation to take care not to come into contact with pollutants, and to ensure—by the proper rituals and the observation of purity rules—that the harm inherent in pollutants is rendered powerless, lest it should contribute to the strength of the evil one. There are many varieties of pollutants: because of the fact that they do not observe the purity rules, unbelievers are polluting and physical contact with them and their possessions must be avoided. All bodily substances—dead matter, such as hair and nails as well as corpses themselves, and all bodily fluids—are polluting and must be dealt with in the proper ways.[3]

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[1] There are no clear indications in Zoroastrianism, that any particular type of behaviour was thought to offend against the purity of the air. This may be due in part to the fact that such things as breaking wind are rarely discussed in Pahlavi literature. In ritual practice, it does imply that the ritual is invalid and that it must be repeated from the start (*N.* 2.11; cf. the edition Kotwal-Kreyenbroek, p. 37 with references). The Yezidis are well-known for the fact that they object to whistling, undoubtedly because this is held to pollute the air (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism* 148). Cf. further *HZ* I, 309.

[2] Cf. *HZ* I, 294-324.

Greeks and Romans did not share the same outlook on the world and have sometimes recorded what they witnessed among the Persians in evident amazement. Greeks and Romans had their own rules concerning the bodily functions, which in general did not correspond with the Zoroastrian ones.[4] This difference by itself caused some of the Zoroastrian rules to be noted by Greek and Roman travellers or writers. Our interpretation of these passages is based on two assumptions: 1) Greeks and Romans were more likely to record what differed from their own customs than what was similar; 2) some of the Zoroastrian customs were considered to be so self-evident by the priests that they did not feel it necessary to record them. This may seem strange for a religious tradition which has recorded so many categories of sins—and has continued to restate and rephrase prohibitions on sins that were in fact very unlikely to be committed at the date of composition—[5] but it seems to be a necessary assumption to account for the fact that there is no clear prohibition against urinating in a river in Zoroastrian literature, whereas it is absolutely certain that this was not allowed.

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[3] There is an introduction to these matters in Choksy, *Purity and Pollution*, but—despite its obvious informative qualities—it is marred by inaccuracies and strange lacunae. For a more promising perspective, cf. A.V. Williams, 'The Body and the Boundaries of Zoroastrian Spirituality', *Religion* 19 (1989), 227-239; 'Zoroastrian and Judaic Purity Laws. Reflections on the Viability of a Sociological Interpretation', *Irano-Judaica III* (1994), 72-89; Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 147-150 with nn. on pp. 162-164.

[4] Interest in these aspects of religious life is a comparatively recent phenomenon. For a good introduction to table-manners in the work of an early Christian author—and the implications of similar literature—cf B. Leyerle, 'Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), 123-141; for an introduction into the problems and an interesting outlook on their implications, cf. B. Moore, 'Public and Private in Classical Athens', in: *id.*, *Privacy. Studies in Social and Cultural History*, Armonk, New York etc. 1984, 81-167.

[5] For instance the sin of walking on one shoe (*ēw-mōg-dwārišnīh*), which probably has a very ancient background, but was no longer understood when the Pahlavi books were composed.

a) *Fire*

Fire is the most sacred element, for it pervades the entire creation and is the main icon of the divine. At all costs and in all circumstances, fire must be kept pure. Offending against the rules governing the purity of fire in many cases is an offense for which there is no atonement; in Zoroastrian (Sasanian) law, capital punishment was prescribed for such offenses.[6] One of the clearest of these offenses was the burning of a corpse, treated in many passages in the Zoroastrian texts. Greeks and Romans were less sensitive on the choice between inhumation and cremation; they are known in fact to have practised both. The ban on the burning of corpses therefore caught their attention. An early example is Herodotus, *Histories* 3.16, where Cambyses is said to have scourged the disinterred corpse of Amasis, and ordered to burn it. This command of Cambyses, says Herodotus, was sacrilegious (οὐκ ὅσια), for "the Persians consider fire to be a god."

In a similar manner, Strabo remarks that whoever blows upon the fire, or puts dung on it, is killed (*Geography* 15.3.14). This is indeed a deadly sin, and the Avesta enjoins the killing of perpetrators, as do the Pahlavi books.[7]

b) *Water*

The sanctity of water, especially of rivers, is a recurring theme in descriptions of the Persian religion. It is also fully corroborated in Zoroastrian literature. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.138, is the earliest witness. He remarks that the Persians do not urinate or spit in rivers, nor wash their hands in them, nor allow anyone else to do so. This statement is repeated by Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.16, who mentions that the Persians do not urinate or wash themselves (νίπτονται) or bathe (λούονται) in rivers, do not throw a corpse into the rivers or anything else they consider polluting (μυσαρός).

Herodotus' stories of Xerxes punishing the Hellespont (7.35; 8.109)[8] were criticised by "those who have written on the Magi," because the Persians consider water to be a god (Diogenes Laertius 1.9). The Parthian king of Armenia Tiridates travelled to Rome by land (which took him nine months), because he did not want to travel by sea: "He did not want to sail, because they think that it is not allowed to spit into the sea, or to violate its nature with any of the other necessities of mortals."[9] His brother Vologeses refused to come to Rome (disregarding Nero's insistence), but passed notice to Nero that "it is much easier for you to sail across this sea than for me" (Dio Cassius 63.7.2), presumably for the same reasons. When performing a sacrifice to the waters, the Persians dig a pit, in which they kill the animal, in order to prevent the blood from defiling the water (Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.14). The pattern is easily recognisable and—in view of the Zoroastrian insistence on the maintenance of the purity of water—wholly correct.[10]

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[6] For an inventory of possible offenses against fire, cf. for instance *AWN* 20; 34; 37; 38; 41; 55 etc.

[7] Other aspects of the importance of fire are discussed in ch. 4.5.1. For the laws against burning corpses, cf. also *Anthologia Palatina* 7.162 (Dioscurides).

[8] M. Rocchi, 'Serse e l'"acqua amara" dell'Ellesponto (Hdt. 7,35)', in: G. Piccaluga (ed.), *Perennitas. Studi in Onore di Angelo Brelich*, [Roma 1980], 417-429. For the currency of the story in antiquity, cf. Juvenalis 10.173-187; Diogenes Laertius 1.9.

c) *Bodily functions*

There are several remarks on Persian prescriptions concerning bodily functions, such as urinating, defecating, vomiting, belching, sneezing and spitting. As a rule, it is recorded that these things are forbidden in public and only performed in private. To a certain extent these prescriptions coincided with those common among the Greeks—for instance the shamefulness of being seen while defecating—but in most instances the Persian customs were recorded because they did not correspond to what Greek men thought normal behaviour.

What struck the Greeks and Romans most were the differences in the way Persian men urinate. Three things apparently were worthy of notice: Persian man did not urinate while standing, did not urinate in public and did not urinate in streams or rivers. The earliest witness to some of the scruples Persian men had in the performance of their bodily functions is Herodotus, who remarks "They are not allowed to vomit, or to urinate in front of each other" (*Histories* 1.133), and "They do not urinate in a river, nor spit in it, nor wash their hands in it or allow anyone else (to do so), but they have the greatest reverence for rivers." (*Histories* 1.138).

Strabo repeats the information given by Herodotus, that Persians do not urinate or wash themselves in rivers (*Geography* 15.3.16). Pliny gives the interesting detail that it is forbidden among the Magi to urinate on a person's shadow, presumably because the shadow has a certain corporeal quality, and urinating on a person's shadow equals urinating on a person's body.[11] The most detailed observation can be found in Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.79: "What is more, one does not easily find a Persian who urinates standing or who withdraws himself for the call of nature."

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[9] Pliny, *Natural History* 30.16; cf. F. Cumont, 'L'iniziazione di Nerone da parte di Tiridate d'Armenia', *Rivista di Filologia* 61 (1933), 145-154, pp. 146-147.

[10] As an illustration, cf. the elaborate discussions of the rules governing the purity of water, sources and streams, in *PhlRAdFb* 37-40; 42-45 etc.

Some of the regulations for urinating are not laid down in the Pahlavi books. Thus, there is no mention of the fact that it is considered shameful to be seen urinating, or to be seen to withdraw for the performance of bodily functions. One can only guess that this was considered so obvious that it did not need comment. The same is largely true for the ban on urinating in rivers. The sanctity of sources of living water is well known and no Persian would even remotely consider urinating in a river. Urinating, a daily act producing *hixr*, "bodily fluids", was always accompanied by taking great care to avoid pollution of one's body and surroundings. This care is exemplified by the fact that the act of urinating is preceded and followed by prayers and that the flow of urine may not go beyond the area from the heel to the toes.[12] A fundamental principle, however, is the ban on urinating while standing. This is already indirectly proscribed in Vd. 18.40, where the man who lets urine go beyond his toes is said to make the demoness Drug pregnant.[13] In several Pahlavi books, the practice is expressly condemned.[14] Ammianus' observation, therefore—whatever its source—fully confirms the practice.

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[11] Pliny, *Natural History* 28.6.64; for this passage, cf. de Jong, 'Shadow and Resurrection.'

[12] SDN 56.3-5: *cūn āb tāxtan benešīnand bāyad ke az pāšneh tā sar-e angošt-e pāy āb tāxtan bīš nakonad ce agar bīštar bovad har qeṭreʾī tanāforī gonāh bāšad. cūn āb tāxtan* x^v*āhand nešastan yek ītā ahū vayryō goftan cūn kārī tamām šavad se ašm vohū, do bār humatan ąm se bār huxšaθrōtəmāi va cahār bār yaθā ahū vairiiō ... ahurəm vairīm tā sar* x^v*āndan*. "When they sit down to pass water, they may not urinate further than from the heel to the tip of the toe, for if [it comes] further, every drop is one deadly sin. When they want to sit down to urinate, [they must say] one *yaθā ahū vairiiō* and when it is done, they must recite three *ašem vohū*, twice *humatanąm*, three times *huxšaθrōtəmāi* and four times *yaθā ahū vairiiō ... ahurəm vairīm*. Cf. also *PhlRAdFb* 64.

[13] Vd. 18.40 basically contains the same prescription as SDN 56 and as such is only indirect evidence for an Avestan ban on urinating while standing. The proper way of urinating—avoiding to let the urine go beyond the toes—seems only possible when squatting, but since squatting must have been the practice among the Iranians, this is not *disertis verbis* ordered in 18.40.

An interestingly elaborate description is found in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, where he explains the fact that one cannot see Persian men withdraw themselves for the performance of their bodily functions by the fact that they work off the moisture through exercise, so that urinating becomes less urgent (*Cyropaedia* 1.2.16): "for even to the present time it is a breach of decorum for a Persian to spit or blow his nose or to appear afflicted with flatulence; it is a breach of decorum also to be seen going apart either to make water or for anything else of that kind. And this would not be possible for them, if they did not lead an abstemious life and throw off the moisture by hard work, so that it passes off in some other way".[15] This is all the more striking because one can be reasonably certain that Xenophon did in fact spend some time in the company of Persians. For someone having lived with Persians for a while not to have seen Persian men urinate, suggests that this was indeed performed strictly in private.

Nudity was also decidedly more problematic for Persians than for Greeks. Dio Chrysostomus, *Oratio* 13.24 records that being naked and spitting in public were the worst things to do for Persians. Much later, Procopius (*De bello Persico* 1.7.18) recorded that it was not allowed for women to be seen naked by men. Zoroastrian texts do not discuss nudity very much, but they simply mention that bodies desire to be covered (*WZ* 30.45) and condemn being seen naked as one of the most disgraceful acts, indeed as an act of sorcery.[16]

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[14] For instance *AWN* 25.3, *MX* 2.39-41; *PhlRDd*. 11.3. Cf. Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, vol. 2, 144.4 for more references.

[15] Trl. W. Miller, LCL. In the final part of the *Cyropaedia*, 8.8.8 and 8.8.11, the same practices are given quite a different (negative) twist. Cf. particularly 8.8.11: "Again, this also was a native custom of theirs, neither to eat or to drink while on a march, nor yet to be seen doing any of the necessary consequences of eating and drinking. Even yet that same abstinence prevails, but they make their journeys so short that no one would be surprised at their ability to resists those calls of nature" (trl. W. Miller, LCL). For the importance of physical exercise in Xenophon's view of Persian national culture, cf. *Oeconomicus* 4.24 with the commentary by S. Pomeroy, *Xenophon. Oeconomicus. A Social and Historical Commentary*, Oxford 1994, 253-254.

[16] There is a problem in terminology here, however: the sin known as *wišād-dwārišnīh*, "open-walking" is sometimes translated as "walking uncovered" or similar terms. This refers to walking without the sacred girdle and the sacred shirt (the *kustīg* and *šabīg*). The term *brahnag-dwārišnīh*, "walking naked" is also sometimes thus interpreted (*Dhabhar*, *TrlZXA*, 115, n. 1); cf. also the passage

d) *Eating 'in bāj'*

Ammianus has preserved yet another possibly genuine observation, but it is problematic. In 23.6.80 he describes Persian dining customs and writes: "No servant who waits upon them, or stands at the table, is allowed to open his mouth, either to speak or to spit; to such a degree, after the skins have been spread, are the mouths of all fettered." (trl. J.C. Rolfe, LCL) This may refer to the practice of eating "in *bāj*" (MP *wāz*). Zoroastrians pray before and after meals. The prayers they say—known as *bāj*—are regarded as a single prayer; it is therefore not allowed to interrupt this prayer by talking during the meal.[17] Similarly, it is considered a grave sin to speak while eating, both because it breaks the *bāj* and because it brings with it strong possibilities of polluting (the air and) the earth with pieces of undigested food, saliva and foul breath. The sin of breaking the bāj and speaking while eating is known as *drāyān-jōyišnīh*, usually translated as "chattering while eating".[18] It is condemned in the strongest possible terms in many passages in the Pahlavi books.[19]

e) *Mourning*[20]

We are not very well informed about Zoroastrian mourning customs. This is partly due to the fact that mourning for a dead person is not highly regarded, indeed strongly prohibited in

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from the second *Patēt pašīmānīg* 10 (Dhabhar, *TrlZXA*, 143), where the sin of *brahnag-tan-dwārišnīh*, "walking with a naked body" is explained as identical to *wišād-dwārišnīh*.

[17] M. Boyce & F.M. Kotwal, 'Zoroastrian *Bāj* and *Drōn* II', *BSOAS* 34 (1971), 298-313.

[18] It is interesting to note that the word is a compound of two *daevic* terms, *drāyīdan*, "(evil) speaking" and *jūdan*, "(evil) devouring", thus underlining the evil inherent in the practice.

[19] For instance, PhlRDd 20.4; ŠnŠ 5.2; *AWN* 23; *MX* 2.33-34; *Andarz ī dastwarān ō wehdēnān* 7 (PhlT. 122.7): "Speaking while eating is so serious, that when a man who speaks while eating, eats and speaks at the same time, a thousand *dēws* become pregnant from his (evil) ritual and ten-thousand *dēws* are born from his (evil) ritual, and the breath from his mouth and his stench go to heaven, before Ohrmazd, and the taste of his tasting that food goes to Ahreman and the *dēws*, and Hordād and Amurdād curse his body, saying: "You will no longer eat-while-speaking from Hordād and Amurdād" (*Drāyānjōyišn owōn škeft kū ka ān ī drāyān-jōyišn mardōm hamāg xwarēd ud hamāg drāyēd hazār dēw pad nērang ī ōy ābustan bawēd ud bēwar dēw pad nērang ī ōy be zāyēd ud damišn ī az zafar ud gandagīh ī ōy be ō garōdmān ō pēš ī Ōhrmazd šawēd ud mizag ī cāšnīg ī ān xwarišn be ō Ahreman ud dēwān āyēd ud Hordād ud Amordād abar tan ī ōy nifrīn gōwēnd kū tō az Hordād ud Amordād wēš drāyān ma jōyēh*).

[20] For an orientation in the subjects involved, cf. H.S. Versnel, 'Destruction,

some Zoroastrian texts; grief and its expressions are thought to strengthen the forces of evil. The focus of these texts appears to have been directed particularly at crying and possibly at long lamentations.[21] In some passages, it is said that the tears spilt for a dead person are all assembled to form a river, which can then not be crossed by the deceased. Therefore, excessive weeping is to be avoided.[22] Weeping for a dead person is still avoided among Zoroastrians.[23] The many descriptions of bodily mutilations as mourning customs among Iranian peoples can also be said—at the very least—to reflect an ethos that differs from the Zoroastrian prescriptions. The ban on excessive mourning customs should not be exaggerated, however, nor can references to mourning be used to demonstrate the non-Zoroastrian nature of the mourners' religion.[24] There are many prescriptions for the relatives of a deceased person on how to behave. Most references are rather fragmentary and stress the compulsory religious rites and prayers that must be said.[25]

In Classical texts, which rarely speak of mourning behaviour after the death of a commoner, we do find descriptions of mourning rituals that took place after the death of a king or a high-ranking noble. These texts open up an altogether different world. These differences may reflect customs that have been influenced by several other traditions, for instance Babylonian or Hellenistic rituals. They are also certainly influenced by the Greek stereotype of excessive Oriental lamentations,[26] but there are some good points that have been made in connection with these rituals.[27]

Devotio and Despair in a Situation of Anomy: The Mourning for Germanicus in Triple Perspective', in: G. Piccaluga (ed.), *Perennitas. Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich*, Roma 1980, 541-618, pp. 577-605 with exhaustive references.

[21] Texts are given in Wikander, *Feuerpriester*, 101, n. 1, with customary interpretation of these texts as directed against the "Totenfeiern der alten Volksreligion," (similarly Widengren, *Religionen*, index s.v. 'Totenklage'), rituals of which we have no knowledge whatsoever.

[22] *AWN* 16; *SDN* 96.

[23] Boyce, *Stronghold*, 153-154.

[24] As is done, for instance, by Widengren, *Religionen*, 36-37; 133-134 etc. *id.*, 'Stand und Aufgaben' I, 58-59.

[25] A typical case, for instance, is *SDN* 96: "Therefore one must read the (proper) Avesta and perform the ritual, so that his crossing will be made easy" (*pas mībāyad ke avestā bex*^{v}*ānand va yazišn mīkonand tā ūrā ānjā godhar āsān šavad*).

[26] Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 83-84.

[27] Especially by P. Briant, 'Le roi est mort: vive le roi! Remarques sur les rites et rituels de succession chez les Achéménides', in: Kellens (ed.), *La religion*

According to a statement in Stobaeus, "it was customary among the Persians, when a king died, that there was (a period of) *anomia* during five days, so that (everyone) would experience how valuable the king and the law are."[28] Similar information is given by Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus Mathematicos* 2.33): "Therefore the clever Persians have a law that when a king among them has died, they have a (period of) lawlessness for the following five days, not for the sake of feeling grief, but in order to learn through this matter how bad lawlessness is, because it brings about killings and robberies and whatever is worse, so that they will become more faithful guardians of the kings."

This period of anomy is recognisable in some other descriptions of Persian mourning customs. It is said, for instance, that the fires which are always kept burning are extinguished upon the death of a king. When Hephaestion had died, Alexander ordered the entire population of Asia to extinguish the fire that is called sacred by the Persians (Diodorus Siculus 17.114).[29] This, Diodorus adds, was only done when the Great King died. His information has been a constant source of amazement, because extinguishing a fire, for whatever reason, is a mortal sin in Zoroastrianism. If all temple-fires had been extinguished, moreover, no rituals could have been performed during these days and it would have been almost impossible to reinstate the fires "throughout Asia." Consecrating a new fire is a very complicated ritual that requires fire from several locations and backgrounds, *inter alia* from a burning temple-fire. This problem has been convincingly solved by Widengren, who invokes later sources that suggest that at the death of a king, the "royal" fires were extinguished. This is evident not only from Arabic literature, but also from the Sasanian numismatic and epigraphic evidence for the custom of dating the reign of the king by the years of (the setting up of) his fire.[30] These royal fires are alluded to quite frequently by some Classical authors, especially in their descriptions of the processions of the Persian kings. Curtius Rufus (3.3.9), for in-

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iranienne, 1-11; Versnel, 'Destruction, *Devotio* and Despair', 549; 585-587. For the interesting materials from Central Asia—where lamentations are attested both in iconographic and in textual sources—cf. Grenet, *Pratiques funéraires*, 259-264.

[28] Stobaeus 4.2.26 (162 Hense), quoted by Versnel, 'Destruction, *Devotio* and Despair', 586; for the concept of anomy, *ibid.*, 601-605.

[29] Briant, 'Le roi est mort', 2.

[30] Widengren, *Religionen*, 318; cf. Christensen, *Iran sous les Sassanides*, 162.

stance, writes that the sacred and eternal fire is carried before the army of Darius III; other authors mention the presence of a chariot with a fire-altar in military (and religious?) processions.[31] Curtius Rufus qualifies this fire in the procession several times as "sacred and eternal" and has Darius invoke the fire. If these are references to the royal fires (as is sometimes assumed), it may be suggested that Diodorus' remarks on the quenching of the "fire that is called sacred" also refers to this particular class of fires.

When Alexander died, Curtius Rufus writes (10.5.17), "the Persians mourned him according to their customs—having shaved their hair, in mourning gown—with their spouses and children, not as if he were a conqueror, and recently an enemy, but with genuine longing as the most just king of their people." These mourning practices, shaving off the hair, wearing special (ragged?) mourning clothes, are widespread throughout the ancient Near East. The practice of cutting off the hair is, for instance, also attributed to Alexander himself and is a known custom from Mesopotamia.[32] Cutting hair is of course a very problematic affair in Zoroastrianism, because of the fact that hair (just like nail-clippings) is dead matter and must be dealt with properly.[33] Iranians, like their Mesopotamian neighbours, may well have cut their hair as a sign of mourning. There are some Zoroastrian regulations that suggest that certain aspects of normal life are indeed reversed in the period of mourning. A clear example is the prohibition of eating meat during the first three days after the death of a member of the family,[34] whereas Zoroastrianism usually accords little value to abstinence from food or from certain foodstuffs.[35] The prohibition of eating meat after the death of a member of the family is a unique occasion, which suggests the reversal of what is customary under Zoroastrian rules. It remains unclear, what the *anomy* signalled by the Classical authors amounted to exactly. The least one can suspect, is the fact that with the quenching of the royal fire, royal rituals were no longer possible and that until the succession of the new king (or the lighting of his fire), the administration of justice was no longer possible, because there was no supreme guarantor of justice.

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[31] Cf. Nagel & Jacobs, 'Königsgötter und Sonnengottheit', 347-348.

[32] Briant, 'Le roi est mort', 2-3.

[33] Cf. *HZ* I, 308-309.

[34] *SDN* 78.

[35] Cf. for instance *SDN* 83, where it is stated quite simply that "one must abstain from fasting" (*az rowzeh dāštan bebāyad parhīxtan*).

2. *Marriage and* khvaētvadatha

The Iranian marital customs are among the most frequently mentioned aspects of Iranian culture in Classical literature. The main focus of attention in the many passages on this subject are the family marriages, between father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister. Apart from the passages referring to these *xwēdōdah*-unions, there are several passages describing general Persian attitudes towards marriage—how many wives the Persians had or which categories of spouses existed—and the enormous jealousy of which Persian men were capable with regard to their wives. These three subjects at least partly reflect generalisations and prejudices held by the Greeks on "Oriental" family relations and barbarian customs, which focused among many other subjects on the *topoi* of barbarian incest and Oriental jealousy. An early testimony to this can be found in the scathing remarks on barbarian ethics in Euripides' *Andromache* 174-175: "Thus the entire barbarian race: the father has intercourse with his daughter, the child with its mother and the girl with her brother."[36] Euripides does not refer specifically to Persian practices, but attributes this type of behaviour to all barbarians. For "Oriental" jealousy with regard to women, there are some good stories in Plutarch, *Artaxerxes* 27.1 and *Themistocles* 26.3-4: "Most barbarous nations, and the Persians in particular, are savage and harsh in their jealous watchfulness over women. Not only their wedded wives, but also their boughten slaves and concubines are strictly guarded, so that they are seen by no outsiders, but live at home in complete seclusion" etc. (trl B. Perrin, LCL).[37]

While we are therefore not in a fortunate position for extracting additional information on ancient Iranian marriage customs from the Classical sources, the sheer number of references to Persian family-marriages in Greek and Latin literature necessitates a closer look at the reports and at the reality behind them. The next-of-kin marriages of the ancient Zoroastrians are an emotional subject, both in academic discourse and among contemporary Zoroastrians. In academic discourse, the subject has been much discussed because it speaks loudly against the validity of the notion of a "universal incest-taboo," which has been the foundation of much anthropological work on family structures. Among modern Zoroastrians, it is a very sensitive subject, because Zoroastrians abandoned the practice a long time ago and at present dislike suggestions that their forebears regarded these matters differently. Since the Greek and Latin sources on incestuous relations among the Persians were the first to be used to convince the Parsis that their ancestors indulged in these marital customs, a new look at precisely this subject should incorporate not only more novel insights in the subject of incest in general, but also the significance of "alterity" in Classical ethnography, and—more in particular—the considerable work done on the subject of *xwēdōdah* by specialists in Iranian languages and religions. One sometimes finds that specialists in other fields of research relating to the ancient world relegate all occurrences of incest to the presence of Iranians.[38] Unless evidence to the contrary is found, however, it seems wise to assume that incest—despite the taboos regulating it—was as common in occurrence in the ancient world as it is today and did not spread from a single cultural source over the ancient world.

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[36] Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 189-190.

[37] On the subject of Persian women and the background of such stories as related by Plutarch, cf. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Exit Atossa: Images of Women in Greek Historiography on Persia', in: A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt (ed.), *Images of Women in Antiquity*, London 1983, 20-33; for the daily life of women in the Achaemenian period, cf. H. Koch, *Es kündet Dareios der König....Vom Leben im persischen Groẹreich*, Mainz/Rhein 1992, 233-250; *ead.*, 'Zu den Frauen im Achämenidenreich', in: P. Vavroušek (ed.), *Iranian and Indo-European Studies. Memorial Volume of Otakar Klíma*, Praha 1994, 125-141. For Zoroastrian attitudes towards women, De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', *passim*.

The Greek and Latin texts on *xwēdōdah* have been collected several times, to be used for different discussions.[39] None of these collections is complete, but since the multitude of texts is caused mainly by endless repetition of information obtained from other Greek or Roman authors, completeness is in this case not necessary. It is in fact likely that even beyond the combined texts collected by the three authors referred to above, there are many more references to be found, of which most, however, will not provide more information than the fact that Persian men have intercourse with mother, daughter and sister.

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[38] A recent example of this is M. Lattke, 'Verfluchter Inzest: War der "Pornos" van 1Kor5 ein persischer "Magos"?', in: A. Kessler, T. Ricklin & G. Wurst (eds.), *Peregrina Curiositas. Eine Reise durch den orbis antiquus* (FS D. Van Damme; *NTOA* 27), Göttingen 1994, 29-55. A likewise curious example is B.H. Stricker, *Camephis* (Med.KNAW.Lett., N.R. 38.3), Amsterdam 1975, *passim*.

[39] N. Sidler, *Zur Universalität des Inzesttabu. Eine kritische Untersuchung der These und der Einwände* (Soziologische Gegenwartsfragen, N.F. 36), Stuttgart 1971, 86-149 ('Inzest und Inzestehen in Alt-Iran'), 89-91; Stricker, *Camephis*, 27, nn. 186-190; 33, n. 234 *et passim*; Lattke, 'Verfluchter Inzest', 41-49.

The earliest unambiguous textual reference to the practice may have been found in Xanthus the Lydian, who is quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 3.11.1, as having written the following: "The Magi have intercourse with their mothers and daughters, and having intercourse with their sisters is allowed, and their women are shared, not by force or secretly, but they come to an agreement when one of them wants to sleep with the other one's wife." Since the authenticity of Xanthus' *Magica*—from which Clement claims to quote—has been doubted,[40] and Xanthus has been accused of being a sensationalist,[41] some caution seems necessary in evaluating his information.

The passage from Xanthus stands in marked contrast with Herodotus' unawareness of the occurrence of *xwēdōdah*-unions among the Persians. Herodotus briefly describes marriage customs among the Persians in *Histories* 1.135, but merely stresses that they practise polygamy and have many concubines. Relevant evidence from the Achaemenian period is lacking, but the evidence from later periods endorses this description.[42] In this and other passages, Herodotus shows no awareness of the fact that marriages between close kin were a common phenomenon among the Persians.

He only refers to these marriages in the famous story of Cambyses' wish to marry his sister: *Histories* 3.31. Herodotus relates that Cambyses wished to marry one of his sisters, and that he inquired among the royal judges if there was a law governing a person wanting to live (in marriage) with his sister. The judges—who are called "interpreters of the ancestral laws" (ἐξηγηταὶ τῶν πατρίων θεσμῶν)—reply that they could not find any law ordering such a union; they had found another law which said that he who rules the Persians can do exactly as he wishes. Upon this verdict, Cambyses marries two of his sisters. In the context of Herodotus' description of Cambyses, this is but one of the many instances of Cambyses' madness. There is reason, therefore, to doubt the historicity of the story: Cambyses may very well have married his sisters, but it is dubious whether he had to consult the "interpreters of the ancestral laws" to obtain permission. In view of the Iranian evidence for the practice—which will be discussed below—the least one can say is that marrying a sister must have been a considerably greater problem for Herodotus and his audience than for Cambyses, his sisters, or his Iranian subjects.

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[40] These doubts are critically discussed by Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi', *passim*.

[41] Georges, *Barbarian Asia*, 122-123.

[42] For the Achaemenian evidence, cf. Koch, *Es kündet Dareios*, 233-241; *ead.*, 'Zu den Frauen im Achämenidenreich.' For the later practice, the evidence from the *MHD* is mostly relevant. The distinctions between different types of marriage are treated, for instance, by C. Bartholomae, *Die Frau im sasanidischen Recht*, Heidelberg 1924. For the texts and commentary, cf. Macuch, *Rechtskasuistik*, index s.v. "Ehe". For further elaborations, cf. O. Klíma, *Mazdak. Geschichte einer sozialen Bewegung im Sassanidischen Persien*, Praha 1957, 92-116.

Even worse in this respect is the indignation that can be felt in Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes*, based—given the frequent quotes—to a considerable extent on the writings of Artaxerxes' court physician Ctesias.[43] Plutarch tells the story of the love Artaxerxes felt for one of his daughters, Atossa. His mother, Parysatis, was aware of his love for this girl and finally persuaded him to marry her: "At last, then, she persuaded the king to marry the girl and proclaim her his lawful wife, *ignoring the opinions and laws of the Greeks*, and regarding himself as appointed by Heaven to be a law unto the Persians and an arbitrator of good and evil" (*Artaxerxes* 23.3, trl. B. Perrin, LCL, emphasis added). There was, of course, no reason for Artaxerxes to show concern for the opinions and laws of the Greeks, but the connection Plutarch makes between this (in his eyes clearly outrageous) marriage and the (equally outrageous) Oriental style of kingship, place this information firmly in the context of barbarian stereotypes. These barbarian stereotypes pervade the entire *Life of Artaxerxes*, which makes this text rather difficult to use. Ctesias is invoked more often as authority on the fact that the Persians practised incestuous marriages; since the king he served (Artaxerxes II) had married his sister Amestris as well as his daughter Atossa, Ctesias can scarcely have failed to be aware of the custom.[44]

More often, the practice simply gets a brief reference. There are countless passages mentioning next-of-kin relations among the Persians in general or their Magi.[45] These references can be found in pagan, Jewish, and Christian authors writing in Greek and in Latin.[46] It may suffice for our present purpose, to have a look at a few of these texts. Philo of Alexandria, *De specialibus legibus* 3.13, writes the following on the custom, in explaining how good the Jewish Law is: "Those of the Persians who are in high office marry their own mothers; they consider those who are born from these (unions) to be of superior birth and, as it is said, think them worthy of the highest sovereignty."

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[43] *Artaxerxes* 2; 11-13; 18; 19 etc. On Ctesias as a source, cf. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, 380; J.M. Cook, in *CHI* 2 (1985), 205.

[44] Cf., for instance, Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 9; *Ad nationes* 1.16.

Philo is one of the few authors to stress two important facts: that the Persians consider the offspring of a next-of-kin marriage to be of the most superior birth, and the fact that such progeny was considered especially meritorious for royalty. It is not known where he obtained his information on this subject. One might consider the possibility that his remarks on the progeny of members of the royal family are due to the fact that several Iranian kings and queens were known in Greek literature to have contracted next-of-kin marriages. Philo's remarks on the children from next-of-kin unions are unique in Greek literature, but are wholly compatible with what emerges from the Iranian texts. The Iranians did not have any awareness of the possible deleterious effects of inbreeding, because they relegated malformations, stillbirth etc. to the activities of the evil spirit in this world. On the contrary, next-of-kin unions were considered not only to increase one's spiritual merit, but also to produce and contain superior qualities in the family. This is evident, for instance, from the most elaborate text on the subject, the eighth chapter of the *PhlRDd*.[47] There it is evident, that abstinence from next-of-kin unions is considered to be the cause of social and personal deteriorations.

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[45] It is misleading that Lattke, 'Verfluchter Inzest', *passim*, attempts to prove that it was a custom that was typical for the Magi (cf. for instance p. 42 on Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 5.63.220C). This is disproved by the Iranian texts themselves (on which, see below).

[46] For instance: Catullus, *Carmen* 90; Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.20; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.13; Curtius Rufus 8.2.19; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 1.28; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogicus* 1.7.55.1; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 6.10.16 (from Bardesanes); Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 9; *Ad nationes* 1.16; Sextus Empiricus, *Outline of Pyrrhonism* 1.152; 3.205; Diogenes Laertius 1.7; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.80; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinum* 2.7; Theodoretus, *Graecarum Affectionum Curatio* 9.33; Agathias, *Historiae* 2.24 etc.

[47] Cf. the edition and particularly the commentary by Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, *ad locum*.

As the first human couple had a next-of-kin union, so the rest of mankind should have done.

A number of sources refer to the next-of-kin marriages among the Persians for a very special reason: they serve as evidence for the fact that there are no cultural universals, or they are invoked to stress the relativity of cultural norms. These sources show a particular connection with discussions current among Stoic and Cynic philosophers. The best example of the use of information on the Persians for such a purpose is Sextus Empiricus, *Outline of Pyrrhonism* 3.205. The discussion in the book focuses on the question whether there are things that are good or bad by nature. This was sometimes denied by the Sceptics; others affirmed that the question cannot be answered: there may or may not be things that are good or bad by nature.[48] Among many examples of this situation, Sextus Empiricus also devotes some thoughts to marital and sexual ethics: "It is unlawful among us to marry one's own mother or sister. But the Persians, and among them especially those who are thought to practise wisdom, the Magi, marry their mothers and the Egyptians take their sisters in marriage, and—as the poet says (Iliad 18.356)—"Zeus addressed Hera, his sister and wife." But also Zeno of Citium says that it is not wrong to rub the mother's genitals with one's own, as no one would say that it is wrong to rub any other part of her body with the hand. And Chrysippus decided in the *State* that the father can have children from his daughter, the mother from her son and the brother from his sister." Passages such as these, are of course entirely dependent on the Greek literary tradition.

Among authors of Latin and Greek, the next-of-kin marriages attracted so much interest, because they evidently clashed with their conceptions of marriage laws. They also clash with most modern views of the related problems of incest and incest taboos. It is necessary, therefore, to have a closer look at the ideology and practice of *xwēdōdah*-unions in ancient Iran.[49]

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[48] For an introduction to these matters, cf. R.J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics*, London 1995, esp. 262-292. The ultimate goal of this type of philosophy was *ataraxia*, the mental state of avoiding any disturbance. For the importance of this ideal in Hellenistic philosophy, cf. Green, *Alexander to Actium*, 602-617.

[49] The literature on the subject is considerable: for a collection of texts, cf. O. Bucci, 'Il matrimonio fra consanguinei (*khvêtûdâs*) nella tradizione giuridica delle genti iraniche', *Apollinaris* 51 (1978), 291-319. The best introductions to the subject are Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, vol. 2, 126-137, and M. Macuch, 'Inzest

The practice of next-of-kin marriages is mainly known under its Middle Persian name as *xwēdōdah*.[50] The Middle Persian word is a rendering of Av. *x^{v}aētuuadaθa-*, which unequivocally means "marrying (*vad-*)[51] within the *x^{v}aētu-*" and the word *x^{v}aētu-* means "family."[52] How close the family ties were to be included into the concept *x^{v}aētu-* is unclear. All mentions of *xwēdōdah* in the Avesta simply mention the practice and sometimes claim beneficial effects from it.[53] The best known Avestan reference to *xwēdōdah* is Y. 12.9, part of the Fravarāne, the Zoroastrian confession of faith, where the Mazdā-worshipping Zoroastrian religion is described as "the religion of *khvaētvadatha*," a usage that gained some currency in Pahlavi literature.[54]

From Pahlavi literature itself, several important characteristics of *xwēdōdah* are known: these unions were considered "normal" and are bound by exactly the same legal prescriptions as all marriages.[55] They were considered to be meritorious in a religious context, and were thought to be among the best instruments against the evil powers[56] and among the highest virtues.[57] *Xwēdō-*

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im vorislamischen Iran', *AMI* 24 (1991), 141-154. Cf. also J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'Reflections on "yaoždā" with a Digression on "xvaētvadaθa"', in: J. Puuhvel (ed.), *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*, Berkeley etc. 1970, 203-210; R.N. Frye, 'Zoroastrian Incest', in Gnoli & Lanciotti (eds.), *Orientalia Tucci*, 445-455. The anthropological assessment of Iranian regulations by J.S. Slotkin, 'On a Possible Lack of Incest Regulations in Old Iran', *American Anthropologist* 49 (1947), 61-68 (cf. also the ensuing discussion in *American Anthropologist* 51 (1949), 326-328), is far from satisfactory.

[50] I will refer to these unions henceforth as *xwēdōdah*-unions, because—as Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat* 2, 126-127 rightly shows—there is no appropriate translation for the word.

[51] Benveniste, *Vocabulaire* I, 239-244.

[52] Benveniste, *Mages dans l'ancien Iran*, 5-13.

[53] A man who has contracted such a marriage is—in salutary company—invoked in Vr. 3.3; the urine of men and women is not admissible for purification, with the exception of the urine of men and women who have contracted a *xwēdōdah*-union: Vd. 8.13. Macuch's claim ('Inzest', 142-143), that the meaning of the Avestan word cannot be based on the Avestan passages, is exaggerated; from these texts, we at least get the information that *x^{v}aētuuadaθa-* was of religious significance (Y. 12.9; Vr. 3.3), had effects on physical purity (Vd. 8.13) and was something that defined a relationship between a man and a woman (*ibid.*).

[54] E.g. *ZWY* 5.5: *dēn ī xwēdōdah*, "the religion of *xwēdōdah*."

[55] Macuch, 'Inzest,' *passim*.

[56] Cf., for instance, the story in which Ahreman declares to Xēšm that Xēšm can ruin the ritual attention and the observances of the *Gāhāmbārs*, but that he will be powerless against *xwēdōdah*, because even Ahreman does not know how to counter the beneficent effects of it: *PhlRDd*. 56.13-16.

[57] Cf. *MX* 4.3: "The highest virtue is generosity and the second truth and *xwēdōdah*" (**mahist kirbag rādīh ud dudīgar rāstīh ud xwēdōdah*).

dah-unions are mirrored in the divine world, especially by the relation between Ahura Mazdā and Spandārmad.[58] The classifications of these unions are rather precise: they consist of marriages between 1) father and daughter; 2) mother and son; 3) brother and sister.[59] Of these three types of *xwēdōdah* (to which marriages with half-brothers and half-sisters etc. may be added), the union between son and mother is considered the most virtuous one; the union between father and daughter is considered superior to the union between brother and sister. The underlying principle—as stated in the Pahlavi texts themselves—is the proximity between the relations: the closest proximity is between son and mother, then between father and daughter and then between brother and sister.

Xwēdōdah-unions are described as an important aspect of the concept of the course of human history: just as the first human couple had a *xwēdōdah*-union, thus the continuation of these unions ensures the proper relations between men and women, and eventually will connect the entire human race from the day of creation to the final Renovation. *Xwēdōdah* is an indispensable part of the preparation of the Renovation.[60]

The information in the Classical texts on the Iranian *xwēdōdah*-unions is thus largely corroborated by the Iranian materials themselves. Marriages between fathers and daughters, mothers and son and brothers and sisters were permitted among the ancient Zoroastrians. At the same time, the Classical texts do not add any significant information to the Iranian sources. The Classical passages on the Iranian custom can therefore not be used for the discussions on the ideology and the practice of *xwēdōdah*-

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[58] *PhlRDd*. 8a2-4. I regard this as an innovation that does not have an Avestan background; cf. De Jong, 'Jeh the Primal Whore?', 33-35. The only possible Greek witness to this is Georgius Monachus, *Chronology* 1.4 (*Fontes* 107), but since he mentions Zeus and Hera as brother and sister it is likely that he projects Greek mythology onto the Iranian practice.

[59] Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat* 2, 134-136; Macuch, 'Inzest', 143-144. As Macuch rightly stresses, the fact that in the case of the mother-son relations, the mother is referred to by the word *burdār*, "she who has given birth (to him)" instead of the common word *mād*, "mother," leaves no room for speculations on the possibilities of the relation being between the son and his father's wife (who is not his mother).

[60] Cf. the evidence from DkM. 72.17-80.6 as interpreted by Macuch, 'Inzest', 143.

unions in ancient Iran or on the origin of the custom among the ancient Iranians.[61]

3. *Death and Funerary Traditions*[62]

The Zoroastrian funerary practices belong to the most eyecatching aspects of Iranian religion. They are at least as much discussed today as they were by foreign observers of Zoroastrianism from Herodotus to the eighteenth century and beyond. This is at least true for the best known funerary tradition of the Zoroastrians: the exposure of corpses in an unfertile place, where the flesh is eaten by dogs and birds. This funerary tradition is so well known and so insistently prescribed in a large section of the *Vendīdād*, that for a long time it has been used as an instrument for the definition of Zoroastrianism itself. This process is usually applied in reverse: if anyone does not observe the rites of exposure he or she cannot be Zoroastrian. This argument can, for instance, be found with great regularity in discussions (with a negative answer) on the question of the Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenians.

Many Classical authors, however, describe different funerary customs (mainly inhumation) among the Persians. By now, a steady flow of epigraphical and archaeological evidence and subsequent discussions of these materials have led to a change in perspective on this problem, almost to its reverse. In spite of the prescriptions found in the *Vendīdād*, many different funerary traditions were current in the Iranian world. These excluded cremation and appear to have excluded burial directly in the earth as well.[63]

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[61] For general introductions to incest and marriage in the ancient world, cf. J. Goody, *The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive. Systems of Marriage and the Family in the pre-industrial societies of Eurasia*, Cambridge 1990; W. Arens, *The Original Sin. Incest and its Meaning*, New York etc. 1986; B.D. Shaw, 'Explaining Incest: Brother-Sister Marriage in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *Man* 27 (1992), 267-299. For interpretations of *xwēdōdah*, cf. the literature given above and C. Herrenschmidt, 'Notes sur la parenté chez les Perses au début de l'Empire achéménide', *AchHist* 2 (1987), 53-67; Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 119-124.

[62] The literature on this subject is enormous; I shall therefore confine myself to some of the most recent publications, where references to further literature can be found. The starting point for all questions concerning Central Asia (but actually moving vastly beyond this area, especially in theoretical and historical matters) is F. Grenet, *Les pratiques funéraires dans l'Asie centrale sédentaire de la conquête grecque à l'islamisation*, Paris 1984. For specific Western Iranian materials, the publication of the 1996 London dissertation of O. L'vov-Basirov is eagerly awaited. Cf., in the meantime, M. Boyce, 'Corpse, Disposal of, in Zoroastrianism', *EIr* 6 (1993), 279-286; *HZ* I, 109-129; 325-330; a good overview of different funerary traditions in Fars is R. Boucharlat, 'Pratiques funéraires à l'époque sasanide dans le sud de l'Iran', in: Bernard & Grenet (eds.), *Histoire et cultes*, 71-78 (with references); cf. also Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 40-43.

The various funerary traditions appear to have included collection of the bones (after exposure) in ossuaries (*astōdān*); burial of the corpse in a slipper coffin; burial of the bones in the earth; dispersal of the bones; burial of the corpse in rock-cut funerary chambers; burial of the bones in rock-cut funerary chambers (also called *astōdān*)[64] and exposure of the dead in specially designed buildings (*daxma-*).

Throughout their history, then, Zoroastrians are known to have considered entombment, burial and varieties of exposure admissible options for the disposal of dead bodies (cremation evidently being a very late development).[65] One may contrast this with the evidence from the Avesta and from several foreign sources, that for instance the Sasanian kings ardently defended exposure as the *only* admitted manner of disposal, but this creates the difficulty that many Sasanian kings themselves were probably entombed. It is time to have a closer look at the ideology, and the practice.

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[63] With the exception of Susa, burial directly in the earth is a rare phenomenon: Boucharlat, 'Pratiques funéraires', 72. This observation finds unexpected confirmation from the funerary traditions of the Yezidis, who do practise burial, but fill up the grave with large boulders, so as to "prevent the earth, as far as possible, from touching the corpse." (Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, 160-161 with n. 134 on p. 167 and T. 19.50 on pp. 318-319; the quoted passage is from R.H.W. Empson, *The Cult of the Peacock Angel*, London 1928, 63 (*non vidi*)).

[64] For this, there is epigraphical testimony from the Aramaic inscription from Limyra in Lycia, beginning with the sentence "Artima, the son of Arzapiya, made this ossuary" (*ʾstwdnh znh ʾrtym br ʾrzpy ʿbd*). Cf. E. Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics* (OLA 1), Leuven 1975, 162-170. The Greek version simply uses the word τάφος, "grave."

[65] Among the modern Zoroastrians, the traditional exposure of dead bodies in *dakhmas* continues to be practised in India and Pakistan. In Iran, where exposure was abandoned in 1936-37 (under pressure of Reza Shah and Zoroastrian reformists), the Zoroastrians have adopted burial and have even considered cremation. The British Zoroastrians practise mostly cremation. This is perhaps the most surprising development, for it seems to entail contaminating fire with dead bodies, the most heinous of all sins. The Zoroastrians argue, however, that it is not fire but electricity or heat. A similar reasoning has apparently been adopted once by an Iranian Zoroastrian priest, as recorded in J. Kestenberg Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran: Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence*, New York 1990, 261-262.

The Avestan word for the place where dead bodies are brought to be eaten by vultures (and in ancient times also by dogs), is *daxma-*. This word—which only occurs in the Vendidād—was once thought to derive from the root *dag-*, "to burn."[66] This could have supported the conviction that cremation was the original method of disposal, but it is wrong. The word has been provided with a new, more convincing, etymology: originally it meant "burial site".[67] Burial indeed seems to have been the common method of disposal among the Indo-Iranians. The Indians gradually adopted cremation and the Iranians, it is assumed, continued to practise burial, but gradually took over methods of disposal current in Central Asia (exposure), possibly because this suited their reverence for the elements better.

Funerary traditions are discussed at length in the Vendidād, which is a book particularly devoted to matters of purity and pollution.[68] Within the Vendidād, different methods of disposal are discussed, recommended and proscribed.[69] There is a clear polemic against inhumation and an endorsement of digging up buried corpses. Burning a corpse is described as a mortal sin. In general, the prohibitions are easier to recognise than the endorsed options. These include exposure in an unfertile high place and exposure in fertile land on a bed of chalk. Many passages from the Vendīdād are constantly rephrased in Pahlavi literature, thus attesting to the general importance of these funerary practices.

The corpse is to be exposed naked, and must be bound to the ground or fastened to it with stones or bricks. The flesh must then be consumed swiftly by birds and dogs. The fastening to the ground is explicitly said to be intended to make it impossible for dogs or birds to take away (parts of) the corpse to places where there are plants or water. A considerable part of the *Pahlavi Rivāyats of Ādur-farnbāg and Farnbāg-Srōš*, for instance, is devoted to questions concerning the observance of these rules; how, for instance, it is permissible to take a corpse out of the water, or draw it away from the road.[70]

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[66] *AIrWb*, 675-676; for (now outdated) speculations on the importance of such an etymology, cf. Widengren, *Religionen*, 36.

[67] For references, cf. *HZ* I, 109.

[68] Cf. *HZ* I, 109-129; 325-330; M. Boyce, 'Corpse, Disposal of, in Zoroastrianism', *EIr* 6 (1993), 279-286 (with references).

[69] A. Kammenhuber, 'Totenvorschriften und "Hunde-Magie" im Vidēvdāt', *ZDMG* 108 (1958), 299-307 (to be used with caution); Boyce, 'Corpse, Disposal of', *passim*.

From archaeological data, however, a different picture emerges. The Achaemenian dynasts were entombed. They used two, possibly three, distinct ways of entombment. The first type is illustrated by the grave of Cyrus in Pasargadae and the monument known as Gūr-i Dukhtar: it is a lone-standing building made of huge cut stones with a small room inside.[71] The second type is illustrated by the tombs of Darius and the other Achaemenian kings in Naqš-i Rustam: funerary chambers cut in the living rock.[72] A possible third type may be the frequently discussed monuments known as the Zendān-i Sulaymān in Pasargadae and the Kaʿbah-yi Zartušt in Naqš-i Rustam. These are high towers with three rows of false windows and a single room—located very high—to which a grand staircase gave access. The interpretation of these monuments is much discussed; they have been thought to be fire-temples, repositories of the royal insignia, royal archives and funerary towers for Achaemenian lesser nobles.[73] More recently, they have been interpreted as buildings that had a particular function in the initiation and coronation of the new king.[74] In view of such different interpretations, these structures must be excluded from a discussion on funerary practices.

Of the funerary customs of the Parthian kings not much is known with certainty. Isidorus Characenus writes that the tombs of the Parthian kings were in Nisa (*Mansiones Parthicae* 12); according to Dio Cassius 78.1, Caracalla desecrated the tombs of the Arsacid kings in Arbela. There thus is evidence to suggest that the Parthian kings were also entombed, although it remains unknown whether their corpses or only their bones were entombed. The situation for the Sasanian kings is similar. We know from later sources that the Sasanian kings were also entombed, but—so far—no tombs of Sasanian kings have been found anywhere. If we turn now to the literary evidence, we also find references to these funerary traditions.

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[70] *PhlRAdFb* 37-46 etc.

[71] Stronach, *Pasargadae*, 24-43.

[72] For references, cf. *HZ* II, 110-116.

[73] *HZ* II, 57-60; Stronach, *Pasargadae*, 132-136.

[74] H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'The Zendan and the Ka'bah', in: H. Koch & D.N. MacKenzie (eds.), *Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte der Achämenidenzeit und ihr Fortleben* (AMI Erg.Bd. 10), Berlin 1983, 145-151.

a) *Inhumation*

The earliest Greek references to Persian funerary traditions are found in Herodotus' *Histories*. In a well-known passage, *Histories* 1.140, Herodotus writes that he has heard rumours on the Persian burial customs: that they leave corpses unburied, to be eaten by dogs and birds. He adds, however, that he knows for certain that the Magi practise this rite, but that the Persians cover a body with wax and bury it. This passage has puzzled scholars working from the perspective that exposure is the only Zoroastrian funerary practice for a long time.[75] If viewed in the light of more recent discussions, however, the passage allows of a better understanding. The Magi, the priests, strictly observed the Avestan prescriptions, but the introduction of Zoroastrian funerary rites was not universally followed. It remains unclear to some extent whether all Persians practised inhumation or whether the rites of exposure could be found among common Persians as well. There is, moreover, the evidence from other passages in Herodotus, on the treatment of war casualties—a sensitive subject in Greek literature. In *Histories* 3.12, Herodotus claims to have seen the skulls and bones of the (Persian and Egyptian) war dead from the battle of Pelusium. In 8.24-25, he writes that Xerxes buried 19,000 of the 20,000 war casualties and only left 1,000 unburied before he invited his allies to inspect the number of war dead. It is difficult to use this information, because Herodotus does not relate how the war dead are treated after this trick, whether they were buried or were left unburied. The problematic nature of leaving especially war dead unburied as a literary *topos* must also be brought to bear on these texts, so that the actual information contained in them is of little value.[76]

Herodotus thus shows that there were at least two different funerary traditions: inhumation and exposure. Of these two traditions, the rites of exposure were religiously sanctioned, as is evident from the fact that the Magi practise them. The rites of inhumation were not religiously sanctioned, but it is not certain whether religious sanction was felt to be required. Whether they were opposed by the priesthood, does not emerge from Herodotus' text, as it does not emerge from any solid evidence (other than the Avesta) before the Sasanian period.[77]

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[75] Widengren, *Religionen*, 133; Benveniste, *Persian Religion*, 32-33; Nyberg, *Religionen*, 336 etc.

[76] Cf. ch. 3.5.3.

[77] Cf. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 41 with nn. 41-42.

More difficult to interpret is the information that the Persians cover the body with wax before they bury it. This is repeated by Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.20 and by Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.45.108. Cicero adds that they cover the body with wax so that the bodies will be preserved as much as possible. It is likely that Strabo and Cicero both derived their information (via unknown intermediary sources) from Herodotus, for in both passages, the inhumation of corpses covered with wax is immediately followed by the statement that the Magi practise exposure. Boyce interprets the texts as references to embalming and suggests that such was the royal practice, which was probably imitated by the wealthy Persians as well.[78] It seems impossible to corroborate or refute this. The least one can say is that it is not evident from Herodotus' text that this practice was current among wealthy Persians only, or that it was common for the kings. It has also been suggested that the covering with wax was a practice current for the funerals of Near Eastern kings,[79] but here as well, confirmation is lacking. We are left, then, with the testimony of Herodotus to the practice of covering dead bodies with wax, followed by inhumation. The latter practice is substantially corroborated by archaeological materials, but the former remains a mystery.

There are many more texts referring to inhumation as the normal funerary practice of the Persians. In the moving farewell speech attributed to Cyrus by Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 8.7), Cyrus says: "Now, as to my body, when I am dead, my sons, lay it away neither in gold nor in silver nor in anything else, but commit it to the earth as soon as may be. For what is more blessed than to be united with the earth, which brings forth and nourishes all things beautiful and all things good? I have always been a friend to man, and I think I should gladly now become a part of that which does him so much good."[80] There is little reason to ponder the realities of this farewell speech, but it is characteristic to the extent that Xenophon remains silent on exposure, and considers inhumation the normal Persian practice. This impression is confirmed by the elaborate story of the death and funeral of Abradatas, king of Susa, who had died in the battle against the Egyptians.[81] His wife, Panthea, had taken his body to the river Pactolus, where she had covered it with her possessions and sat down with his head in her lap. When Cyrus hears this, he immediately amasses many valuable objects as grave-goods, and cows, horses, and sheep for sacrifices,[82] and goes towards the place where Panthea is mourning her dead husband. He covers the body with the grave-goods, performs the sacrifices and promises a funerary monument for Abradatas. The story ends with a collective suicide of Panthea and three eunuchs and consequently the funerary monument is erected for all five. There are no grounds to assume any historicity behind the story, but it is striking that here again burial is the only supposed Persian funerary practice, and that grave-goods (commonly found in Median burials) were accompanying the dead.[83]

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[78] *HZ* II, 182.

[79] Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, London 1962 (repr. New York 1966), 147. Herodotus (*Histories* 1.198) records that the bodies of Babylonians were covered with honey. The Scythians also covered bodies with wax (*Histories* 4.71), the Spartans used honey if they were short on wax (D. Asheri, *Erodoto. Le Storie I*, Milano 1991^3, 347).

[80] *Cyropaedia* 8.7.25, trl. W. Miller, LCL. For Xenophon's description of Cyrus' death, cf. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'The Death of Cyrus: Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* as a Source for Iranian History', in: *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* II, (AI 25), Leiden 1985, 459-471; and particularly D.L. Gera, *Xenophon's* Cyropaedia, 115-131.

Similarly, Curtius Rufus writes (3.12.13-14) that Alexander granted Darius' mother the right to bury the body of her son according to the national custom. Lucian writes that it is the Persian custom to bury (*De luctu* 21.932). Sextus Empiricus, on the contrary, writes that the Persians impale the dead, embalm them with sodium carbonate, and then wrap them in bandages (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.228). This is an incomprehensible passage; it cannot refer to the Egyptian practices, because Sextus Empiricus describes those in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.226. Evidently, no such practice is known from Iran. It does, however, recall the treatment of Bessus, the murderer of Darius III: his body was impaled, mutilated and shot at with arrows; his executioners took care that vultures could not come near his body, according to Curtius Rufus (7.5.40).

A well-known poem of the Alexandrian epigrammatist Dioscurides (third century BCE) beautifully sums up this Persian tradition of inhumation. The Persian slave Euphrates addresses his master: "Philonymus, do not burn Euphrates, nor defile fire on my account; for I am a Persian of true ancestry, native-born, my master. And to defile fire is for me harder than cruel death. But, wrapping me round, commit me to the earth, and pour no libations upon my body. Master, I reverence even rivers."[84]

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[81] *Cyropaedia* 7.3 For the name, cf. R. Schmitt, 'Bakchylides' ἁβροβάτας und die Iranier-namen mit Anlaut *ABRA/O-*', *Glotta* 53 (1975), 207-216. For the story, cf. Gera, *Xenophon's* Cyropaedia, 221-245.

[82] This (*Cyropaedia* 7.3.7) is interesting in itself, for it recalls the heroic sacrifices described in the *Yašts*, which mostly consist of stallions, cattle, and sheep.

[83] For Median grave-goods, cf. *HZ* II, 25-26 with references.

b) *Entombment*

It is certain that the Achaemenian kings were entombed. This is clear not only from Cyrus' grave, but especially from the royal Achaemenian tombs at Naqš-i Rustam, of which Darius' tomb is identified as such by the presence of inscriptions (DNa/b). The three other rock-cut tomb chambers have been assigned to later dynasts, but the attributions cannot be ascertained, because the tombs were not inscribed.

The rock-cut tombs did not attract the attention from Classical authors. There is a famous reference in Athenaeus (from Duris or from Ctesias), that Darius had written on his tomb (μνῆμα) "I could drink much wine and bear it well."[85] Other than this story, however, there is not much of value on the tombs of the Achaemenian kings.

This is different with respect to the tomb of Cyrus, which is described in considerable detail in several passages. These descriptions, in fact, have been instrumental in identifying the monument now universally recognised as Cyrus' tomb.[86] Cyrus' tomb is referred to by Strabo, Curtius Rufus, Pliny, Plutarch, Arrian and Solinus.[87] Several of these authors refer to the work of Aristobulus and Onesicritus. Although the descriptions of Cyrus' tomb are not identical, most authors place the tomb in Pasargadae, and mention that it was kept in verdant surroundings and was guarded by priests. In the tomb, Cyrus' body was kept in a golden coffin and surrounded by a golden couch and a table with cups. When Alexander came to Cyrus' grave, it had been looted, much to his distress. It seems therefore that Aristobulus and Onesicritus, who both accompanied Alexander, never saw the interior of Cyrus' tomb before it was looted. Certain peculiar points of the descriptions of the interior—the golden coffin, for instance—therefore reflect more the imagination of these authors than the reality of the tomb's interior.[88]

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[84] *Anthologia Palàtina* 7.162, translated by P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, Oxford 1972, vol. 1, 279-280; 604. For commentaries, cf. *ibid.*, vol. 2, 435-436; 855.

[85] Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 10.45.434d, on which R. Schmitt, 'Achämeniden-inschriften in griechischer literarische Überlieferung', in: *A Green Leaf. Studies in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen* (AI 28), Leiden 1988, 17-38. Fake tomb-inscriptions of illustrious dynasts and fake funerary inscriptions in general are a favourite subject among certain classical authors. Similar stories can be found, for instance, on the inscription on the tomb of Cyrus (Arrian 6.29), the tomb of the Babylonian queen Nitocris (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.187) or the tomb of Belos (!) desecrated by Xerxes (Aelianus, *Varia Historia* 13.3).

[86] Stronach, *Pasargadae*, 24-43.

[87] Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.7-8; Curtius Rufus 10.1.30-31; Pliny, *Natural History* 6.26.116; Plutarch, *Alexander* 69; Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.29.1.4-7; Solinus, 55.2.

We know from Greek literature that the Parthian kings were also entombed. Isidore of Charax mentions Parthian dynastic tombs in the capital city Nisa (*Mansiones Parthicae* 12) and Dio Cassius writes that Caracalla desecrated the tombs of the Parthian kings in Arbela (78.1). It has indeed been suggested that the funerary monuments excavated in Nisa would correspond to the royal tombs of the Parthian kings mentioned by Isidorus.[89] Royal Parthian tombs have not been found in Arbela; we are therefore not in a good position to judge the entombment of Parthian dynasts, for which we only have Classical testimony (and a possible archaeological confirmation). On the much disputed question whether the Sasanian kings also practised entombment (evident from Arabic literature)[90] the Classical texts have nothing to offer, for they remain silent on the subject.

c) *Exposure*

The best known funerary rite of the Iranians was the exposure of corpses to be devoured by dogs and birds. Together with some other eye-catching aspects of Persian life (incestuous marriages, the special position of the king, the cult of fire) this is what made the Persians wholly different from the Greeks. Greek literature abounds in descriptions of corpses being eaten by dogs and birds, remaining unburied. In general, these texts do not describe Persian practices, but reflect an important Greek literary *topos*, current from Homer onwards. To be eaten by dogs and birds is a constant threat to the heroic qualities of the participants in the Trojan war. A related threat is to be left unburied, to decompose in the fields.[91] That this topos influenced the ways in which some Greek authors viewed the Persian rites of exposure, may be apparent from the fact that Strabo writes that the Persians leave the bodies to be eaten by birds by using the word οἰωνόβρωτος (*Geography* 15.3.18). This rare word is known from Philodemus, *De Morte* (together with its sister-word κυνόβρωτος),[92] and from 2Macc 9.15 and 3Macc 6.34; all these passages refer to the fear or threat of remaining unburied. The combination of dogs and birds as those who eat the corpses (commonly encountered in the passages describing the Persian funerary customs) also owes more than a little to the fact that this is the standard combination in literary passages describing the fear of remaining unburied.

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[88] The Median graves excavated so far have not yielded golden objects (*HZ* II, 25), and Strabo explicitly, though probably wrongly, writes that it is illegal to bring gold into contact with a corpse (*Geography* 15.3.18). In Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.7.25, moreover, Cyrus explicitly asks on his death bed that his followers do not put his body in gold (among other things). Curtius Rufus (10.1.30-32) writes that Alexander thought to find great treasures in Cyrus' tomb, but that it only contained a shield, two Scythian bows and a dagger. In the *Alexander Romance*, it is also said that Cyrus' tomb contained a golden sarcophagus, which was intermingled with glass, so that his hair and his entire body were visible (p. 88.17-20 Kroll). The crystal coffin (also said to be in use by the Indians by Lucian, *De luctu* 21), is of course a well-known motif from folk literature (witness Snow White and others).

[89] Grenet, *Pratiques funéraires*, 89-92.

[90] Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 120-121.

As was noted above, the earliest reference to the rite of exposure is Herodotus, *Histories* 1.140, who mentions that the practice was said to be current among the Persians, that it was actually—openly—practised by the Magi, but not at all normal among the other Persians. Xenophon does not seem to know of the practice. Strabo's information is largely similar to that given by Herodotus. In another part of his *Geography*, Strabo describes a related practice among Iranian peoples: the murder of the elderly and the sick. This will be treated in a separate section (see below). Strabo also writes that anyone who puts a corpse on a fire is killed (*Geography* 15.3.14), which appears to be confirmed by the later Zoroastrian tradition.

Junianus Justinus, in his *Epitome* of Pompeius Trogus (41.3.5), also records the practice, and adds that the naked bones are buried. This appears to be correct: the bones are thought to be pure and there is no prohibition against burying naked bones. Sextus Empiricus does not record the practice for the Persians, but does write that the Hyrcanians give dead bodies to the dogs (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.227).

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[91] These themes are beautifully developed by J.-P. Vernant, 'La belle mort et le cadavre outragé', in: Gnoli & Vernant (eds.), *La mort, les morts*, 45-76. For the topos in the Iliad, cf. also C. Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad* (Mnemosyne Suppl. 17), Leiden 1971. For comparable fears in Mesopotamian literature, cf. E. Cassin, 'Le mort: valeur et représentation en Mésopotamie ancienne', in: Gnoli & Vernant (eds.), *La mort, les morts*, 355-372.

[92] Philodemus, *De Morte* 33.21-22, possibly in reference to Iliad 1.4-5 (thus T. Kuiper, *Philodemus. Over den dood* (Diss. Amsterdam 1925), 86-87).

Theodoretus, *Graecarum Affectionum Curatio* 9.33 also records the practice, which was a particularly important subject for the Christians: "They had learnt from him (that is Zaradēs, A.J.) to deliver the corpses to dogs and birds, but the believers no longer continue to practise this, but they bury in the earth, and those who have given up this practice do not pay attention to the laws, nor do they shudder at the cruelty of those who punish (them)." In their commentary on this passage, Bidez and Cumont drew attention to what is the most detailed reference to the practice apart from Agathias: the Greek version of the martyrdom of the virgin Ia: "They ordered the guards that her remains should be watched over, so that no one would bury her, before the birds of heaven had come down and had eaten her body, because it is not customary among the Persians to bury corpses, lest the earth is defiled, they say."[93]

Procopius has preserved some similar narratives which are almost certainly historical. The first of these is concerned with Seoses (Sīyāwuš), the *artēštārān-sālār*, "commander of the forces" of the Sasanian army and one of the participants in the negotiations with the Romans. Sīyāvuš was accused by his enemies of two things: worshipping new deities and having buried his wife (*De bello Persico* 1.11.34). His case was tried before the great council and he was condemned to death.[94]

In *De bello Persico* 1.12.2-6, Procopius relates the fate of the Iberian king Gourgenes. The Iberians were Christians, governed by a Christian king who owed allegiance to the Persian king. The Sasanian king Kawād, trying to establish Zoroastrian orthodoxy throughout his realm, "sent instructions to the king of the Iberians, Gourgenes, to follow all Persian practices, and in particular not to bury the dead but to throw them all to the birds and dogs."[95] These instructions proved fatal to the Sasanian hegemony, for Gourgenes immediately approached the Byzantine emperor Justin and sided with Byzantium in the conflict.

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[93] Bidez-Cumont, *Mages* II, 83, n. 2; text from H. Delehaye, *Actes des martyrs persans* (PO 2), 7.11 on pp. 460-461.

[94] Christensen, *Iran sous les Sassanides*, 355-356. Christensen argues that Sīyāvuš was a Mazdakite, but this is entirely speculative.

By far the most elaborate discussion of Persian funerary traditions is found in Agathias' *Histories*. Agathias describes the practice twice, once in *Histories* 2.22-23 and once in 2.31. In 2.22-23, the occasion to discuss the Persian funerary practices, is the death of Mermeroēs (Mihr-Mihrōy), who was wounded in battle during the wars (between Persians and Byzantines) in Lazica. Mermeroes died in 555 CE in Mtskheta; he had been transported to that city after he had been fatally injured.[96] The Persians, to Agathias' astonishment, did not bury their fallen leader, but took his body out of the city and laid it there, to be devoured by dogs and birds. The Persians, it seems, acted in accordance with the Zoroastrian prescriptions, which direct that a corpse—if no dakhma is available—should be brought to an infertile place and fastened to the ground (Vd. 6.44-46). The same practice, of course, was not only strictly against the current Christian practices, but also against the expected honours due to military leaders who had died in battle. Agathias therefore explains the practice to his audience: "For this is the Persian funeral practice: the flesh is removed in this way and the exposed bones rot, scattered at random all over the plain. They consider it irreligious to place the dead in a tomb or container, or even to bury them in the ground."[97] Agathias continues his explanation of the practice with observations on the swiftness with which the body is devoured. According to his information, if a corpse is devoured quickly, the bereaved think that the soul of the deceased is happy and destined to go to heaven. If the dogs and birds hesitate to consume the flesh, the soul of the deceased is thought to be destined for a worse afterlife. This can only find confirmation from much later sources (chiefly European travellers reporting on the Zoroastrians of Iran and India) and from Persian Zoroastrian literature.[98]

In *Histories* 2.31, Agathias gives another example of the practice. Some Greek envoys to Khusraw came upon a corpse lying in a field in Persia. They were astonished and appalled at the bar-

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[95] Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, 282.

[96] For this episode, cf. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, 298-307.

[97] *Histories* 2.23, translated by Cameron, 'Agathias on the Sassanians', 79.

[98] Boyce, 'Corpse', 281.

barian fate of this poor dead man. Therefore, they wrapped the body up and buried it in the earth. Night came and they went to bed. One of them had a dream in which an unknown venerable old man appeared to him, resembling a philosopher (with cloak and long beard). The old man called out to him and gave him the following admonition: "You should not bury that which is unburied. Let it become a prey for the dogs. The earth, the mother of all, does not accept the man who defiles his mother." He immediately awoke and told his companions his dream. They became nervous, not understanding what the vision meant. At dawn, they secretly went to the place where they had buried the corpse, and found that it had been unearthed again—as if the earth had rejected the corpse and thrown it out. They filled up the grave they had dug and continued their journey, concluding that the Persians considered it best to be licentious with their mothers, to remain unburied and to be dispersed by dogs. The latter remarks—though evidently intended to show the depravity of Persian culture—would not be too farfetched for a Zoroastrian to adhere to.

d) *Exposure of the sick and elderly*[99]

Throughout ancient literature, we find reports on the custom of expelling the sick and the elderly and leaving them to die. This is a particularly difficult subject to treat, because there is the distinct danger that the reports are the product of the imagination of the Greek authors concerning barbarian cultures, and that their main literary function was to establish a notion of Greek civilisation by contrasting imaginary barbarian practices with venerable Greek institutions, in this case respect for and care of the elderly and treatment of the sick. Particularly in the cases where the custom of killing the elderly is coupled with endocannibalism,[100] it seems that the reports are so thickly overgrown with Greek misconceptions of barbarian peoples, that they are difficult to interpret with the goal of reconstructing ancient non-Greek civilisations.

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[99] Bremmer, *Early Greek Concept*, 103-104; K.E. Müller, 'Zur Frage der Altentötung im westeurasiatischen Raum', *Paideuma* 14 (1968), 17-44 (with references); F. Paudler, *Die Volkserzählungen von der Abschaffung der Altentötung* (FF Communications 121), Helsinki 1937; J. Koty, *Die Behandlung der Alten und Kranken bei den Naturvölkern* (Forschungen zur Völkerpsychologie und Soziologie 13), Stuttgart 1934.

[100] Attributed to the Derbices and the Massagetes. Cf. Bremmer, *Early Greek Concept*, 104 with n. 94.

Particular difficulties in this respect may be expected for the origins or reasons given for the practice. At the far end of the spectrum of possible explanations we may suppose ancient (and modern) theories of civilisation, attributing incredible cruelty to primitive or non-civilised peoples. In many reports (and modern theories), on the other hand, (absence of) utility of the sick and elderly is stressed, or lack of food or water. In those cases, it is said that when the elderly are of no more use—for instance incapable of working because of their advanced age—they are simply done away with. According to Strabo, for instance, the inhabitants of the Greek island of Keos had a law that prescribed that any person older than 60 should be killed (poisoned), so that there would be enough food for all (*Geography* 10.5.6).

At the other end of the spectrum of explanations, is the possibility that the practice was in fact the ancient variety of euthanasia,[101] that it was only applied in cases of extreme and terminal illnesses, to save the sick person more suffering. As modern discussions of euthanasia legislation abundantly show, this is rarely presented in positive terms by those who reject the concept. They are in fact wont to interpret lenient euthanasia legislation as the endorsement of latent desires to rid the nation of those who—for whatever reason—are of no more use.

If we turn to the Iranian peoples said to practise the killing of the elderly and the sick, we find that the practice is attested for the Persians (Agathias, *Historiae* 2.23), the Bactrians (Strabo, *Geography* 11.11.3), the Caspians (*ibidem*), the Hyrcanians (Porphyrius, *De Abstinentia* 4.21), the Scythians (*ibidem*) and the Soghdians (Plutarch, *De Alexandri Magni Fortuna* 1.5.328C). Particularly noteworthy are the reports from Onesicritus in Strabo and from Agathias.

Strabo quotes Onesicritus to the effect that the Bactrians give those who are old or sick alive to dogs they keep especially for that purpose. These dogs are called "undertakers" in the local language. As a consequence of this practice, one can see within the city walls of Bactra an enormous amount of human bones. Alexander forced the Bactrians to give up the custom. This report has been called a "grisly fantasy" and a "gratifyingly horrid traveller's tale."[102]

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[101] Müller, 'Altentötung', 17-29, suggests this interpretation, but then (35-42) prefers to view it in a religious context, by comparing it with sacral regicide.

It is evidently difficult to distinguish fact from fiction here. The description Agathias gives of the exposure of those who suffer from a serious disease (*Histories* 2.23; cf. ch. 3.5.3), is the only elaborate description we have of the custom. There, it may be assumed that it is a genuine description of the treatment of those who suffer from serious contagious diseases: they are removed from the army campsite and have to sustain themselves, until they either die or recover. In view of this practice, it may be wise to consider the possibility that a similar custom underlies some of the reports on the treatment of those who are old or sick.

4. *Religious Education*

The education of Persian young men has attracted a great interest in Greek literature. The contents of the training as reported by several Greek authors, moreover, are remarkably consistent: Persian boys are taught how to ride a horse, to handle weapons (bows or javelins) and certain skills which are usually rendered as "telling the truth" or "justice." It is this latter aspect of the Persian education which has attracted considerable attention in modern scholarly literature, because of the difficulties in imagining how it is possible to teach anyone to speak the truth.[103]

The earliest witness to this is Herodotus, *Historiae* 1.136: "And they train their sons—beginning at the age of five to the age of twenty—three things only: riding a horse, shooting the bow and telling the truth." Something similar is said by Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.18. Strabo, however, adds considerable detail to his description: "From five years of age to twenty-four they are trained to use the bow, to throw the javelin, to ride horseback, and to speak the truth; and they use as teachers of science their wisest men, who also interweave their teachings with the mythical element thus reducing that element to a useful purpose, and rehearse both with song and without song the deeds both of the gods and of the noblest men."[104] (trl. H.L. Jones, LCL)

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[102] *HZ* III, 7-8.

[103] H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg has written a paper on the subject ('Did the Persians speak the Truth?') that has so far not been published. Cf. meanwhile, *ead.*, 'Political Concepts in Old-Persian Royal Inscriptions', in: K. Raaflaub (ed.), *Anfänge politischen Denkens in der Antike* (Schriften des historischen Kollegs. Kolloquien 24), München 1993, 145-163, pp. 150-151, and '"Qui a inventé l'école?"', in R.E.V. Stuip & C. Vellekoop (eds.), *Scholing in de middeleeuwen* (Utrechtse bijdragen tot de mediëvistiek 13), Hilversum 1995, 9-36, pp. 12-17.

A different representation of Persian education is given by Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.2.6-7: "The boys go to school and spend their time in learning justice; and they say that they go there for this purpose, just as in our country they say that they go to learn to read and write. And their officers spend the greater part of the day in deciding cases for them. For, as a matter of course, boys also prefer charges against one another, just as men do, of theft, robbery, assault, cheating, slander, and other things that naturally come up; and when they discover any one committing any of these crimes, they punish him; and they punish also any one whom they find accusing another falsely. And they bring one another to trial also charged with an offence for which people hate one another most but go to law least, namely, that of ingratitude; and if they know that any one is able to return a favour and fails to do so, they punish him also severely. For they think that the ungrateful are likely to be most neglectful of their duty toward their gods, their parents, their country, and their friends; for it seems that shamelessness goes hand in hand with ingratitude; and it is that, we know, which leads the way to every moral wrong." (trl. W. Miller, LCL)

In the deprecating final chapter of the *Cyropaedia*—which turns all expressions of admiration in the preceding books and chapters into its reverse—the summary of this aspect of education is as follows (*Cyropaedia* 8.8.13): "Again, it is still the custom for the boys to be educated at court; but instruction and practice in horsemanship have died out, because there are no occasions on which they may give an exhibition and win distinction for skill. And while anciently the boys used there to hear cases at law justly decided and so to learn justice, as they believed—that also has been entirely reversed; for now they see all too clearly that whichever party gives the larger bribe wins the case."(trl. W. Miller, LCL)

These three texts offer a very practical description of an undoubtedly idealised system of Persian education. In the pseudo-Platonic *Greater Alcibiades* (1.121E-122A), we encounter a description of the Persian system of education that reflects the ideals of the Academy. The subject of the passage is the education of princes: "When the boys are seven years old they are given horses and have riding lessons, and they begin to follow the chase. And when the boy reaches fourteen years he is taken over by the royal tutors, as they call them: these are four men chosen as the most highly esteemed among the Persians of mature age, namely, the wisest one, the justest one, the most temperate one, and the bravest one. The first of these teaches him the magian lore of Zoroaster, son of Horomazes; and that is the worship of the gods: he teaches him also what pertains to a king. The justest teaches him to be truthful all his life long; the most temperate, not to be mastered by even a single pleasure, in order that he may be accustomed to be a free man and a veritable king, who is the master first of all that is in him, not the slave; while the bravest trains him to be fearless and undaunted, telling him that to be daunted is to be enslaved." (trl. W.R.M. Lamb, LCL)

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[104] The remainder of the passage, which treats the organisation of these groups of young men, their diet and their customs (and applies to them the word *kārdāg*, "wanderer") has attracted much attention, because of the similarities in organisation and customs with similar age-groups in Indo-European cultures: for bibliographical references, cf. J.N. Bremmer, 'The Suodales of Poplios Valesios', *ZPE* 47 (1982), 133-147, pp. 144-145.

Similarly, Nicolaus Damascenus writes (*FGrHist* 90 F 67): "Cyrus the king of the Persians, more than anyone else, was experienced in philosophy, in which he was instructed by the Magi. And he was taught justice and truth according to the fixed national traditions among the nobles of the Persians."

Such traditions, it seems, acquired a life of their own in Greek and Latin literature. They appear to be reflected at least in Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.41.90 and Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 3.100, where it is said that no one can become king of the Persians unless he has been instructed in the theories (*disciplina* and *scientia*) of the Magi.

The different representations of the Persian training are evidently partly inspired by the different visions on the subject of education itself among the Greek authors. Xenophon's description of the Persian system is often held to reflect Spartan rather than Persian practices, although the structural similarities between the systems in Herodotus, Strabo, Pseudo-Plato and Xenophon speak against an interpretation which relies wholly on the Spartan example. The educational ideal discussed in the *Greater Alcibiades* betrays not a little influence of the Academy, with its hierarchy of philosophy-justice-courage and its emphasis on moderation.[105] That Persian boys from the warrior class would be instructed in riding a horse and handling weapons seems natural; these are among the basic skills of that class. None of the descriptions of Persian education goes beyond the warrior class; the training of priests and the education of the agricultural class among the Persians are simply not referred to in Classical literature.

Some of the elements of the non-practical component of education are remarkably consistent: the subject of the education is (telling the) truth (ἀλήθεια), justice (δικαιοσύνη) or both. The instructors are found among the very wise men (Strabo), the most excellent men in four cardinal virtues (wisdom, justice, moderation and courage) or—simply—among the Magi. Other elements are found in one author only: Strabo adds the fascinating detail that mythology is part of the curriculum and that the things taught include "the deeds of the gods and of the noblest men" which are apparently rehearsed both with song and without song, both in poetry and in prose. Xenophon restricts his description of the Persian education to the arbitration of cases, a training in practical law (cf. also *Cyropaedia* 1.3.16-18), but adds two interesting observations: the education is an oral process (for it replaces the customary reading and writing exercises of Greek youths) and the boys have to listen to the arbitration and discussion of the cases.[106] Pseudo-Plato specifically claims that the lore of the Magi, the worship of the gods, according to the teachings of Zoroaster, was part of this education. If we combine the evidence, therefore, it seems to refer to a type of religious instruction, where the boys were taught the recitation of the sacred texts together with the explanation of the religious doctrine. The Magi instructed them in the basic tenets of their religion and in a corpus of texts they had to learn by heart. Apart from this it appears that practical law was also part of the instruction and was taught through the discussion of cases, undoubtedly in order to learn the boys how to administer justice once they will have reached the high places that are destined for them.

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[105] For these aspects, cf. Olympiodorus' commentary on the passage, as edited by L.G. Westerink, *Olympiodorus. Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, Amsterdam 1956, on pp. 101-102.

[106] Xenophon has one other interesting observation: the moral objections to ingratitude (ἀχαριστία). He can barely hide his pleasant surprise at this attitude. It reflects very well the fact that one of the worst sins that mankind can commit is "ingratitude" (Phl. *anespāsīh*). In *GBd*. 14.12-29, the first human couple, Mašyā and Mašyānē, are said to have committed several offenses to the gods and to the fire, which are summed up as *anespāsīh*. This sin eventually leads to their notorious act of devil-worship.

In ancient Greece religious instruction and socialisation was a matter of the family. The children acquired an understanding of the principles of religion in the process of attending rituals and festivals.[107] In ancient Iran, religious instruction was given in religious schools. Both the centre of learning and the matters taught were referred to in Middle Persian as *hērbedestān*. This type of learning was not reserved to the members of the priestly class, but members of the lay community—men or women—could also receive instruction.[108] This is clearly not an innovation of the Sasanian period, but reflects a situation that was in existence already in the Achaemenian period.[109]

Apart from the evidence of the *Hērbedestān*, we have no Iranian materials for the reconstruction of Iranian education in the pre-Sasanian period. From the Sasanian and the post-Sasanian periods, however, we do have some very good evidence for the matters taught. It is always dangerous—for some even unacceptable—to project this back into the Achaemenian period, but some of the structures are unlikely to have been a Sasanian invention and bear a striking resemblance to the system of education as described by the Classical authors.[110]

From Sasanian literature, we can learn that the education of young men destined for a high office incorporated a substantial portion of religious studies. The boy addressing king Khusraw in *King Khusraw and his Page*, claims to know by heart the *Yašt ī Hādōxt*, the *Yasna* and the *Vendīdād*.[111] Although this may represent an idealised version of what young men were actually taught, the text strongly suggests that those who were not priests also had to acquire a substantial knowledge of the religion. It is this instruction in religious matters, it seems, that was represented by the Classical authors as the teaching of "truth" and "justice." In Sasanian literature, there is a strong emphasis on the equal importance of religious and secular affairs; therefore, those destined for high secular office, had to learn much about the religion.[112]

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[107] J.N. Bremmer, 'The Family and Other Centres of Learning in Antiquity', in: J.W. Drijvers & A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Centres of Learning. Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 61), Leiden 1995, 29-38.

[108] For all these matters, cf. the introduction to Kotwal & Kreyenbroek, *Hērbedestān* (pp. 15-24) as well as the text itself. For similar injunctions, cf. Dk. 6.68; 98; 310; 316.

[109] This is evident from the fact that the basic text of the *H.* is in Avestan. Composition in this language is generally thought to have been beyond the capacity and wish of the priesthood from the late Achaemenian period onward.

[110] The evidence mainly comes from literary romances, such as the Pahlavi text *King Khusraw and his Page*, the Pāzand text *The Duties of Schoolboys* or the story of the education of Sīyāvuš in the *Šāhnāmeh*. Arabic literature also has much to offer; cf. E. Yarshater, *CHI* 3, 406-407; Christensen, *Iran sous les Sassanides*, 415-418.

[111] Cf. Kotwal & Kreyenbroek, *Hērbedestān*, 17.

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[112] Cf. S. Shaked, 'From Iran to Islam. Notes on some Themes in Transmission', *JSAI* 4 (1984), 31-67.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

After this lengthy survey, it may be useful to return to the main question of the present study: to what extent do the Classical sources confirm or modify conventional reconstructions of ancient Zoroastrianism? In view of the variety of information that can be obtained from the Classical sources, it is impossible to give an unambiguous answer to this question. The information in most authors individually is not enough to make definite statements on the characteristics of the religion they are describing. Combining the information from all authors to draw a picture of ancient Zoroastrianism also entails serious difficulties. We risk, moreover, ignoring local varieties or developments of the religion, or the opposite: extrapolating from highly specific developments, evident from a limited number of authors, essential characteristics of the system of ancient Zoroastrianism. In these final observations, we will confine ourselves to a summary of the main findings of the preceding chapters and an outline of some trends that may have become evident from the Classical texts on Zoroastrianism.

The earliest Greek reference to the religion of the Persians is found in Herodotus' *Histories*. The latest author of a substantial text taken into account is Agathias. Between them, more than a millennium had passed; the Persians had ruled the world and lost their empire; Iran had been occupied by Macedonians, who in turn had lost their hold on the country to the Parthians; finally, the Parthians had been replaced by the Sasanians, who repeatedly took it upon themselves to reestablish a strong version of Zoroastrian orthodoxy in their realm. Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism and Mazdakism had appeared in Iran and spread among the Zoroastrians and Zoroastrians had spread all over the ancient world.

It is unrealistic to suppose that Zoroastrianism as a living faith did not change in this period. The Iranian sources, however, show only faint traces of such developments as must have taken place. This is due to the fact that most sources are the final repository of a long process of oral transmission of priestly views. There are no historical works in Zoroastrian literature, apart from some texts which preserve traces of the mythical historiography of the Zoroastrians, reflecting the idea of a progressive spread of the Zoroastrian religion in the dynastic history of ancient Iran. As is well known, this history does not include the Achaemenians, who are only represented by their last monarch, Darius III; his only function in the narrative is to be defeated by Alexander.

To reconstruct the history of Zoroastrianism, therefore, other evidence must be used. The Classical passages on the religion of the Persians are an important source of information, because there is a considerable body of relevant passages in Greek and Latin, many of which can be dated. If we confine ourselves to the earliest and latest sources, the enormous development of the tradition is evident: Herodotus describes a religion without temples and organisation; Procopius mentions a hierarchy in fire-temples and the church historian Sozomenus knows of a hierarchy of priestly titles, where previously Classical sources mention only one type of priest: the Magus.

If we disregard the sources reflecting the religious situation in the Sasanian period, however, traces of the development of the religion are not so evident. Some notable developments are reflected in the Classical texts, such as the development of a statue-cult and of a temple-cult of fire, but the representations of the religion of the Persians in Classical literature are mainly as timeless and a-historical as the Iranian sources. This is partly due to the fact that the majority of passages do not derive from personal observation or communication with Persians, but are based on literary borrowing from a selective number of earlier Greek authorities on Persian affairs. In many cases, the origin of the information is unknown, which diminishes the evidential quality of such a passage considerably.

Even if the Classical sources thus are not helpful in establishing a chronology of developments in Zoroastrianism, they are of great importance for a different reason. They show some important aspects of Zoroastrianism as a living faith in the ancient world, more than the Iranian texts themselves do. They also have a certain benefit over the Armenian, Syriac and Arabic reports: contrary to those, most Greek and Latin authors did not have a religiously inspired bias against the Persians and their faith. The

Armenians look at Zoroastrianism as the paganism from which they were converted to Christianity and represent it accordingly. In Syriac literature, Zoroastrianism is mostly represented as the religious tradition responsible for the death of countless Christian martyrs. Arabic literature represents Zoroastrianism as a relic from the past, a stage in religious history that has been superseded with the coming of Islam and for which no real use can be discerned.

Greeks and Romans did have a cultural bias against the Persians. The effects of their attitudes towards the Persians have been in the centre of interest in the past decade. There appears to be wide agreement that Greek stereotyped attitudes towards Persian culture are but little reflected in their descriptions of the religious customs of the Persians. Therefore, even if only a minority of the Greek and Latin texts on the Persians is based on contacts with Persians or their Magi, the Classical representations doubtless inform us more than any other contemporary source on the religious life of the Persians.

Most representations of Zoroastrianism in antiquity are reconstructions of that tradition based on the combined evidence of the Avesta and the Pahlavi books. Some modifications are usually made on the basis of the Old Persian inscriptions, the Elamite tablets and archaeological evidence from Iran itself, from Central Asia and from Anatolia. In general, however, the tradition that emerges from the Avesta and from Middle Persian literature functions as the standard with which the information from these additional sources and the information from foreign discussions of Zoroastrianism are compared or contrasted. In chapters one and two, some reasons were given why such a procedure is less applicable in the case of Zoroastrianism than it is in the case of, for instance, Judaism or Hinduism. The main problem is the fact that it seems impossible to use reconstructed versions of normative Zoroastrianism as an instrument to assess the veracity of the Classical passages, as long as it is unknown how reliable these reconstructions themselves are.

We have distinguished three trends in academic reconstructions of the history of Iranian religions. Of these trends, it appears that the strong forms of both the fragmentising views and the harmonising views receive little support from the Classical texts. There is no trace of a plurality of religious traditions among the Iranians. On the contrary, in the Classical texts, only one religion is recognized: the religion of the Persians. This religion is often connected with the name of Zoroaster, who enjoyed a wide reputation in the ancient world as the founder of the order of the Magi, and by extension as the founder of the wisdom or religion of the Persians.

The strong form of the harmonising approach is not supported by the Classical texts either. One of the pillars of this approach, the emphasis on the fact that Zoroastrianism was a credal faith, is not reflected in the Classical sources at all. There is not a single instance of conversion (except the re-conversion of apostate Zoroastrians, only in Christian sources) and there are only faint traces of a shared doctrinal system.

The fact that these approaches receive little support from the Classical texts may of course be attributed to certain deficiencies that inevitably occur in the description of a religious system with which the Classical author reporting on the religion of the Persians was previously unacquainted. There are good reasons, however, to assume that this is not the most likely explanation.

In chapter two, it was already suggested that there are substantial differences between the priestly and the lay traditions in Zoroastrianism. Such differences can be found in the Zoroastrian texts themselves, but they are also strongly suggested by the Classical texts. Of all Classical passages, there is one that is clearly exceptional: Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 46-47. This text describes and interprets a form of Zoroastrianism that is well known from the Iranian sources: cosmogonical dualism, the doctrine of the Heptad, the idea that the cosmos was initially good, but tainted with evil, the belief that evil will finally be defeated and that a better world will come into being after this defeat. Plutarch also gives information that appears to be unique, but this fits very well in a broader range of priestly speculations. This is precisely what Plutarch claims to transmit: the mythology of (Zoroaster and) the Magi. Since it is likely that all information in *De Iside* is based on Plutarch's readings in earlier Greek literature, one may suppose a somewhat more extensive body of Greek writings transmitting these priestly traditions. Several authors associated with the Academy and the Peripatos have been suggested as likely candidates for such writings, which is confirmed by Diogenes Laertius' catalogue of lost works on the religion of, again, the Magi.

The Persian priesthood enjoyed a wide reputation in the ancient world. From the earliest references to the religion of the

Persians to the latest sources taken into account, the Magi are the supreme symbol of the religious life of the Zoroastrians. They are a separate group among the Persians, who are in control of most aspects of religious life. They accompany the Persian armies on the move and direct the decisions on religious matters in war situations. They have an important place at the royal courts, where they direct the worship of the gods, act as advisers to the kings and as interpreters of dreams and other portents. Their two main responsibilities are ritual and theology.

The rituals performed by the Magi are described in considerable detail by various authors. These rituals include animal sacrifice, fire rituals, libations and the recitation of sacred texts. In their performance of the rituals, the priests are represented as wearing a *tiara*, the *paitidāna* and holding the *baresman*. They feed the fire with wood and animal fat and perform elaborate libations. In rites of animal sacrifice, they either are said to direct the ritual, or they are present to recite the appropriate texts. The Magi are presented as a hereditary guild or a priestly tribe. They are responsible for the (oral) transmission of the sacred texts and for the education of the laity. They also are the authorities in theological matters. It seems significant, therefore, that those passages which reflect the Zoroastrianism as found in the Avesta and the Pahlavi books, most often attribute the contents of their descriptions to (Zoroaster and) the Magi.

It is *a priori* unlikely that the religious traditions of the priesthood corresponded to the religious life of the laity. Lay Zoroastrians, after all, are not trained to be ritual specialists, nor to be theologians. The descriptions of the religion of lay Persians, royal as well as common, in Classical literature show some notable differences with the descriptions of the religion of the Magi.

In those passages where the religious beliefs and customs of Persian royalty are described, we find the kings under the spiritual guidance of the Magi. Specific royal rituals are overseen, initiated or guided by the priesthood. This is true of the royal initiation at Pasargadae, of the ceremonial processions and of the sacrificial rituals performed by the king. There are almost no Iranian sources to compare these royal rituals with, so that details of the rituals often remain vague and uncorroborated. Nevertheless, it is striking that the divinities mentioned in the context of royal rituals are almost exclusively limited to Zeus, Mithra, Anāhitā, the Sun and fire (or the hearth).

Classical representations of the religious life of the Persians in general are also substantially different from the traditions of the Magi. Their pantheon is said to consist of a fairly limited number of divinities. The supreme god of the Persians—priests, kings, laymen and commoners—is said to be Zeus, whose name undoubtedly is a translation of Ahura Mazdā. Other prominent divinities are Anāhitā and Mithra. Apart from these divinities, the Persians are said to worship the elements and luminaries, particularly fire, water and the sun. There is no trace of the Amesha Spentas, nor any substantial trace of dualism. This does not necessarily indicate the absence of these pillars of Zoroastrian theology, but can also reflect the limited importance of these theological notions in the daily life of Zoroastrians.

Most Classical texts in fact give information on the daily life of Zoroastrians. Several aspects of it are well reflected in Greek and Latin literature. Most significantly, evidence is provided for the importance and observance of the purity rules. It is thus frequently stressed that fire is cared for and kept unpolluted, and that many rules are observed in the use of water. Similarly, a certain care for the earth is sometimes recorded, particularly in the context of the eye-catching funerary traditions of the Persians. Other aspects of daily religious life among the Persians that are reflected in Classical literature are the next-of-kin marriages, the killing of evil creatures (often attributed only to the Magi) and the recitation of prayers.

An area where there is a very clear deviation from the hypothetical Zoroastrian norm is the cult of Anāhitā. The popularity of this goddess is wholly incommensurate with the importance of Anāhitā in any sort of Zoroastrian doctrinal system. Her cult as it is described by some Classical authors, moreover, reflects a cultural adaptation to the religious situation of Anatolia. The temple states of Anāhitā in Zela and Comana were identical in organisation to the temple states of the Anatolian divinities Men or Ma in Pontus and Cappadocia. With regard to the rituals in the Anāhitā-sanctuaries, however, we are only informed that they were similar to those performed in more traditional fire-temples.

The Classical texts thus appear to reflect two manifestations of the Persian religion: the priestly tradition, which is largely compatible with the Avestan and Pahlavi evidence but shows considerable variation in details, and the religious life of the laity, which is mainly characterized by the observance of a set of (religiously inspired) customs. Most notable among the lay Persians is the absence of a clearly circumscribed religious system resembling classical Zoroastrianism. If we accept that a small part of the descriptions of the religion of the Persians derives from personal observation and from communication with Persians (and this cannot be doubted), these descriptions must be considered to reflect the religious life of the Zoroastrian laity. Sources to compare these traditions with should therefore not be sought in the Gāthās or in technical priestly documents, but in those parts of Zoroastrian literature that are relevant to lay religious life.

Within these two manifestations of the religion of the Persians, we find a certain unity and coherence, which may be thought to reflect Western Iranian Zoroastrianism. Several areas of religious life, both in priestly and in lay contexts, show a remarkable variety. Priestly speculations appear to have varied much more than is reflected in Pahlavi literature. There were priests who held that Ahura Mazdā had increased in size three times at the beginning of creation. Others propounded a theology in which Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu were preceded by a primal unity, Zurvan, time, or space; or that the two spirits came into being from an earlier duality of light and darkness. Eschatological visions likewise varied: some priests thought that the cosmic battle would last only three thousand years, after two periods of equal length in which Ahura Mazdā and Angra Mainyu had reigned individually. We learn of a bodily as well as a spiritual resurrection.

In lay religious life, we also find many departures from what we usually expect on the basis of the Iranian sources. Some festivals celebrated by the Persians were wholly different from those known from Iranian sources. The Sacaea, possibly celebrated in honour of Anāhitā, is only known from Classical sources; the detailed description of the festival for Mithra in various Classical authors suggests that the festival was far more prominent than one could infer from the Zoroastrian texts. The cult of the Amesha Spentas is virtually unknown from Classical texts, with the exception of Vohu Manah, who shared an altar with Anāhitā. Several distinct funerary traditions continued to exist side by side, without—it seems—any significant reaction from the priesthood or part of the population. A whole range of royal rituals, unknown from Iranian texts, were celebrated and probably created—possibly on Mesopotamian or other examples—to suit the wish for distinctive ceremony.

Areas where a certain coherence or uniformity can be discerned are the importance of fire and water in devotional life, the importance of purity rules, and the worship of a limited group of gods. The most important area where uniformity is evident is the existence of the priesthood. More than anything else, the Magi have determined the appearance of the Persian religion in Classical literature. Even in those passages where lay religious life is described, the Magi are often present. Any discussion of Zoroastrian theology in antiquity is therefore by necessity a discussion of the traditions of the Magi. These traditions, throughout Classical literature, are part of the history of Zoroastrianism. They reflect a variety of views current in ancient Zoroastrianism, combined with a shared ritual and devotional life. In other words, these passages show ancient Zoroastrianism as a living faith, a social reality in the ancient world, with as much diversity as most other religious traditions.

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